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ABSTRACT

This collection of essays addresses the particular qualities of character education in Catholic schools. The focus of the essays is on developing Christian character in students and the envisionment of the Catholic school graduate as a Christ-like person. Specific suggestions are made for early childhood, middle school, and secondary school teachers. The eight essays are as follows: (1) "Character Development in the Catholic School" (Patricia H. Cronin); (2) "Character Education and Our Children" (Mary Sherman); (3) "The Gift of Love...The Heart of Virtue" (Mary Carol Gentile); (4) "Character Education: Reflections from a High School Principal" (John Hoffman); (5) "A Perspective from a Religious Educator" (Kimberly Klugh); (6) "A Reflection from a Superintendent of Schools" (William Carriere); (7) "A Perspective from a Catholic University Educator" (Mary Peter Travis); and (8) "Character Development Is Non-Negotiable" (Matthew J. Thibeau). (BT)

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CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Patricia H. Cronin, Ph.D.

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Patricia H. Cronin, Ph.D.

Department of Elementary Schools
National Catholic Educational Association

1077 30th Street NW Suite 100
Washington, DC 20007-3852

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Dedication

To
Dr. Joseph F. Rogus
Associate Dean
University of Dayton

Dr. Joseph Rogus was an enthusiastic member of the Planning Committee that envisioned this program. Like everything he did, he gave himself entirely to this project. Sadly, he died a few months before this book was published.

Anyone who met Joe Rogus knew that he had a passion for education and a special affection for Catholic schoolteachers and administrators. One cannot look at the NCEA Convention Programs over the last 15 years and not see his name mentioned at least once. He traveled to numerous dioceses to share himself with others. We Catholic and American educators are grateful to Joe for his writings and lectures in which he so readily shared all that he had. When he gave a lecture, he started gently, then his coat would come off, soon he would be running or skipping up and down the aisles gesturing to make a point, finally he

would shake his whole body with a deep laugh to emphasize an important point.

We are grateful to him for his inspiration. Knowing Joe even briefly made you love education and the students. With great love and admiration, some would say that Joe was a character; all would say that he had character. This is the legacy that he has left to us.

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Robert J. Kealey, Ed.D., Project Director
Executive Director
NCEA Department of Elementary Schools

Patricia Cronin, Ph.D.
Metro Achievement Center

Michael Daigneault
President
Ethics Resource Center

Antoinette Dudek, OSF, Ed.D.
Assistant Executive Director
NCEA Department of Elementary Schools

Regina Haney
Associate Executive Director
NCEA Department of Chief Administrators
in Catholic Education

Cheryl Ann Hillig, DC
Teacher
St. Peter Cathedral School

Thomas Lickona, Ph.D.
Director, Center for the 4th & 5th Rs
State University of New York at Cortland

Michael Lieb
Vice President
Association of Catholic School Teachers

Catherine McNamee, CSJ, Ph.D.
Senior Scholar in Residence
St. Thomas University

Rev. Joseph Merkt, S.T.D.
Director Russell Institute of Pastoral Ministry
Spalding University

Janet Murray
Principal
St. Ignatius School

Joseph F. Rogus, Ph.D.
Associate Dean
University of Dayton

Mary Tracy, SNJM
Associate Executive Director
NCEA Department of Secondary Schools

Paul Vitz
Professor of Psychology
New York University

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ing it in a most professional manner. She willingly submitted her manuscript to others for their critique and graciously made revision after revision. The membership of NCEA now has a clear statement of what character education means in the context of the total Catholic school community.

Character Development in the Catholic School

Patricia H. Cronin, Ph.D.

Assuming that the attainment of academic excellence can be much the same in the Catholic and the non-Catholic school, what should the distinctive and unique contributions of the Catholic school be to its students? What should the differences be in young people who have been educated in Catholic schools when compared to those who have been schooled elsewhere? In light of the central significance the Catholic religion has in the mission of the Catholic school, these questions can be rephrased to ask: What will be noteworthy in the lives and demeanor of Catholic school graduates who have been taught to love God, to cherish and practice their Catholic faith and encouraged to lead Christian lives?

A Renewed Call for Character

From their beginnings, Catholic schools have been committed to sharing with parents the responsibility to develop character in their children. This commitment is inherent in the mission of the Catholic school. As an educational institution shaped by faith and religious practices, the Catholic school acknowledges and integrates into its teachings the necessary relationship between belief and behavior, between faith and morals. Instructing students in their Catholic faith includes, but also goes beyond, explanations of dogma and principles and encouragements to be constant in observing religious practices. For religion to have meaning and serve as a significant guiding force in their lives, children must be taught how to live their faith. We try to show them how to live the faith every day in such ways as simple acts of kindness and sharing, tempering the satisfaction of desires with patience, prudence and self-discipline, and choosing

to be honest, just and tolerant when other options might be tempting. It is largely through the daily practice of virtuous behaviors that children can become open to forming a close relationship with God.

Character is that lasting and distinctive part of the inner person that governs behavior through informed choices and good habits. Historically, nothing in the environment of the Catholic school has been too small or insignificant to serve as an opportunity to contribute to the formation of a strong character. For the most part, these efforts have been informal and unstructured when compared with the academic curricula. Teachers have relied mainly on their own judgment and talents to mingle teachings, advice, examples of good behavior, appropriate readings and positive discipline with traditional courses of study and daily lessons.

Today's moral climate is creating the need for a more intensive and coordinated effort to build character. In order to help teachers, as well as parents, we need a comprehensive program that is more focused and rooted in our knowledge of the nature of character and the ways it can be cultivated in children. There is deep concern about the wellbeing and moral fiber of children who are being reared in our present culture. In many ways, the world of today challenges and counters all the forces for good that the traditional institutions of family, church and school can muster. The entertainment, sports, advertising and fashion industries are appropriating the minds, hearts and loyalties of children and luring them to shallow, self-centered life styles. The breakdown of the family and the wide-spread separation of childbearing and rearing from marriage make many children vulnerable and undermine the power of parents to fight against these inroads on their influence and authority. Traditional standards for behavior—the distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil—are being eroded. They are being replaced by relative values dictated by self-interest and individual satisfaction. The pleasures of money, sex and power have become our culture's goals.

Lives focused on material values will have little time or place for virtuous behavior. Yet, we find ourselves living in a world that calls for heroic virtue on the part of those who have so much to reach out to help and share with the many who have so little. Through the daily news media we are aware of the marked differences in the quality of human life around the world. There is

a widening disparity between those who enjoy the fruits of the earth and the dignified lives that all human persons should have and those who have almost nothing. Many of today's children will grow up to become knowledgeable and capable adults, prepared in many ways to assume the challenges of leadership. But we also want them to have the compassion, the concern for others and the spirit of self-sacrifice to motivate them to confront and help to solve these universal problems of injustice and abuse of human life.

While academic excellence is an important goal for schools, even the best academic education is not enough to produce a well-rounded person who can deal with the moral conflicts of today's world and use his or her knowledge in the service of truth. It has become almost commonplace in our times to hear disturbing revelations about prominent, well-educated people who are respected for their outstanding accomplishments and talents, but whose personal behavior is destructive and immoral. Education and noteworthy achievements cannot conceal or compensate for a lack of moral character. Education is a process of formation of the whole person. Academic education that is not rooted in strong personal morality falls far short of preparing young people to lead productive lives in which they show as much concern for the needs, rights and well being of others as for their own.

As Catholic educators, we want to give our students the finest education possible for success in the work they will choose for their adult lives. However, if we do not strengthen them enough to direct their lives by making and acting on the right choices, they will fail to achieve life's most significant goal—that of being good persons who love and serve their Creator and all others well.

The Objective: A Christ-Like Character

Central and distinctive in the Catholic school's broad mission to educate is the commitment to join with parents in instructing their children in the Catholic religion, and to develop in them an enduring character that will govern their behavior and enable them to live happy, fulfilled lives in accordance with the teachings of their faith. The perfect model for a strong character is Jesus Christ. In essence, character development in the Catholic school combines an education in faith and in morals by

inspiring and teaching children to live as Christ lived and as Christ commanded everyone to live: loving and serving God and all of one's brothers and sisters on earth.

The Nature of Character

Dignified in a unique way among all living creatures, humans are endowed with intellect, will and a range of emotional responses. We possess the ability to understand and acquire knowledge, to experience the motivating feelings that are a part of emotional expression, to choose among alternatives for behavior, and to form a conscience to enlighten and encourage us to do good and avoid evil. Guided by the teachings and example of adults, especially parents and teachers, the growing child learns to use the powers of understanding and choice to develop an inner character composed of an enduring configuration of attitudes, abilities and habits that shape and govern behavior in accordance with objective standards.

In a person of good character, there is a convergence of :

1) a knowledge of moral goodness that should define all behavior — the right things to do;

2) a desire to be a good person by doing good;

3) a well-formed and active conscience to guide, to judge and to create a sense of obligation to do the right and good thing, despite obstacles or personal sacrifice; and

4) an array of firmly established habits of virtuous behaviors that evoke good behavior readily and consistently.

Essentially, a strong character is formed and maintained as an active and well-formed conscience becomes a consistent moral guide and such virtues as patience, generosity, honesty, obedience, understanding, respect, tolerance, prudence and perseverance become habits.

The Christ-Like Character

The teachings that define personal goodness and form the basis for individual character are derived from the natural law and from the revealed Law of the Old Testament and the New Law of the Gospels of the New Testament. These laws are the work of God, the Creator.

The natural law embodies objective, unchanging and universal principles to govern behavior that are accessible to everyone through the use of reason. Such dictates as respect for the

lives, rights and property of others, honesty, and obedience to established authority apply to all persons. Everyone must observe these dictates if the good of society and all its members is to be preserved. The natural law establishes the foundation for morality on the human level by defining fundamental rights and obligations. All persons are obliged to respect and conform to the natural law.

The revealed Laws of the Old and New Testaments are "a fatherly instruction by God which prescribes for man the ways that lead to the promised beatitude and proscribes the ways of evil." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 1975). These laws confirm the natural law but also speak to us about the deeper meanings of human life. Through these laws we are called to a higher and richer level of virtuous behavior.

The revealed Law of the Old Testament is set forth in the Ten Commandments, described in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a preparation for Christ's teachings in the Gospels of the New Testament, especially His lesson on the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (sections 2052–2055). In the beatitudes, we find the model for the actions and the attitudes for a Christian life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 1717). In these teachings of Christ and the example of His life on earth we have the ideal for a strong Christian character. As He spoke and ministered to those who followed Him, Christ was gentle, kind, patient and understanding. He was firm and just but always loving and merciful toward the deprived, the poor, the bereaved, the sick and dying, and the repentant sinner. In His parables Christ gave examples of love, compassion and forgiveness, setting the pattern for Christian behavior. Teaching children to find happiness in this life by being good, by loving God and each other, and by working to achieve the "promised beatitude" of salvation through faith and goodness on earth, means showing them how to be Christ-like in everything they do.

Thus, character development in the Catholic school encompasses much more than teaching children to obey rules and avoid wrongdoing. A major emphasis should always be on nurturing goodness and the contributions that a virtuous life can make to personal happiness and spiritual fulfillment. Especially, it should be through the abundance of their charity—the love they have and the good they do for others—that students who have been formed to be Christ-like will be distinguished. Christ's own words call everyone to follow His example of loving and giving

selflessly and with sacrifice: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John, 15:9) Thus, Catholic school students will be encouraged to go beyond doing all that should be done for others out of feelings of duty and obligation. They will be asked to reach out and strive with compassion and generosity to do everything that can be done for others; to serve, as fully as possible, anyone who might be in need—loved one, neighbor, stranger or enemy. The depth and breadth of their charity will enrich their faith and their practice of all of such other-centered virtues as kindness, patience, understanding, respect, tolerance and justice.

One of the earliest moral lessons that generations of children educated in Catholic schools have heard is the New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke, 10:30-37) The Samaritan gave freely of himself and his possessions to a stranger in need when others before him had felt no concern and had passed the man by. When Christ's listeners agreed that the afflicted man's neighbor had been the one who was merciful to him, Christ told them to "Go and do likewise." Building on this powerful lesson of charity and the lessons of the many other parables and events of the New Testament, children in the Catholic school learn why they should love and help others. They learn about the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy and the revered place these works should have in their lives. The works of mercy—among them, to comfort the sorrowful, forgive injuries, bear wrongs with patience, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless and bury the dead—are freely given acts of charity. Through practice such works will help to build the core of a Christ-like character.

As most significant resources for developing character, the teachings of the New Testament are central to a program of character development in a Catholic school. The New Testament is the best guide we will ever have for the formation of goodness in children. Every child in every Catholic school should become thoroughly familiar with the New Testament by learning the knowledge it imparts, as well as through the daily practice of its many lessons.

The Goals of Character Development

There are three underlying goals for developing character in children:

1. The cultivation of a desire to be good so that they undertake

and persist in living lives of care and concern for themselves and others.

2. The formation of a lasting habit of introspection about their behavior and its consequences to enable them always to be aware of how they are treating themselves and how they treat other people.
3. The development of an understanding of the reasons why they should be good and the ways in which they can be good.

In order to develop and maintain a good character, children have to want to be good. They need to learn to appreciate and strive for the emotions of satisfaction and peace when they do the right thing, even when it is difficult and seems to be unrewarding. They also need to learn that it is desirable to avoid the unpleasant emotions of guilt, shame and regret when they are not good.

Putting children in touch with their own behavior and its consequences and motivating in them the desire to act in the service of goodness is the essence of character education. All three dimensions are essential—knowing what to do, wanting to do it and doing it.

The Distinguishing Attributes of Character

Devising programs and projects that will develop and strengthen character in the Catholic school setting should begin by addressing the following questions: How does a child become a good person? What are the intellectual, the emotional and the social skills a child needs to acquire in order to behave well? Especially, what are the foundational elements of a Christ-like character and how can they be developed and enhanced in school? And, how can teachers strengthen and motivate children to undertake the spiritual mission of listening to and heeding the message of the Gospels?

To answer such questions as these we can begin by reflecting on the fundamental traits and abilities that distinguish a person of good character. There are four components or attributes that we can always find in a person of good character: (1) a positive sense of self, (2) a well-formed and active conscience, (3) the skills of decision-making and choosing, and (4) an array of virtuous habits.

1. A good character is rooted in a positive sense of self, an awareness of and confidence in one's personal worth.

Persons with a positive sense of self:

a. feel valued and worthy of being loved. They have developed trust because they have experienced love and are therefore optimistic that they will elicit positive responses from others. They are able to receive the kind of satisfaction from others that allows them to be emotionally free to love and give to others.

b. have acquired the social skills, especially cooperating and sharing, that enable them with confidence in their equality and acceptance to interact appropriately with others.

c. are able to earn praise and approval through their overall behavior.

d. have confidence they can perform in an acceptable way and compete with their peers in at least some areas.

e. have learned to appraise themselves appropriately and to set realistic goals.

f. are comfortable with and accepting of rules and limits imposed by parents, teachers and legitimate authority.

A positive view of the self as a person of worth and value formed by the above-described attitudes and accomplishments is critically important to the development of a good character. It lies at the core of the personality and shapes character in a most basic way. Experienced teachers can bear witness to the fact that children who do not feel worthy and valued have a difficult time being good.

2. A person of good character has developed a well-formed and active conscience.

This includes:

a. a desire to be a good person.

b. knowledge of morality and the habit of evoking this knowledge when evaluating behavior, especially when confronted with the need to judge alternatives for action.

c. a strong and motivating feeling of obligation to do the right thing.

d. feelings of satisfaction and peace when the right choice is made.

e. feelings of guilt, shame and remorse when the wrong choice is made.

Conscience plays a very significant role in forming and maintaining a good character. It is that "inner voice" which speaks to us about and judges the quality of our behavior. The potential for conscience formation exists in every person. It is developed

in childhood and adolescence through adult teaching, encouragement and example, as well as through adult correction of bad behavior by appropriate limiting, instruction and discipline. The growth and education of one's conscience should then continue throughout one's life.

The goal in cultivating a conscience in children is to help them to be self-directed in knowing and deciding whether a choice of behavior is a right or wrong choice, and feeling obligated to choose the right thing and to avoid wrong choices, even in the absence of outside reminders and prohibitions. An active conscience is not confining or limiting. Rather, it is a liberating asset, a strength that can always be relied upon as a consistent moral guide. An active conscience gives the person the freedom to focus on goodness.

3. A person of good character has learned and uses the following skills of decision-making and choosing:
   a. choosing purposefully rather than impulsively by discovering and reflecting on alternatives for acting in a situation that involves choice.
   b. evaluating alternatives, especially in terms of whether they are right or wrong and their consistency with beliefs and morals.
   c. considering the consequences of behavior before choosing to act.
   d. incorporating what has been learned by experience from one situation to another and appropriately applying it to new situations.

   Teaching children how to make decisions by evaluating alternatives and ultimately selecting a course of action in line with their beliefs and moral standards enables them to move beyond their vulnerability to manipulation by outside forces. Pressures from the culture and the media, as well as from friends, associates and family members, will always be present in their lives. However, if young people have acquired the habit of deliberating and weighing the long-term as well as the immediate consequences of their choices, the outside influences can be evaluated more objectively.
4. A person of good character has a wide array of virtuous habits, such as honesty, temperance and patience, which are practiced consistently.

A person of good character is self-disciplined largely because of habits that strengthen efforts to be good, especially when it is

inconvenient or difficult. Such a person has a balance of habits that serve their own needs, such as responsibility, perseverance, prudence, orderliness and sincerity, and habits that serve the needs of others, such as generosity, tolerance, justice and loyalty.

A habit is a strong behavioral disposition that is acquired through voluntary and consistent practice. Once established, a habit is resistant to change, although it can be changed or no longer practiced through voluntary action. A virtuous habit is a developed disposition to act in accord with a code of morals. For example, generosity is a virtue that involves heeding the needs of other people, a moral requirement for everyone. Through regular acts of sharing and giving a child gradually acquires a disposition to think of others and be generous.

The formation of virtuous actions is another key element in shaping a healthy personality and an enduring character in children. Virtuous actions are a means of controlling and directing human emotions, such as desire, elation, anger, fear and shame, which are driving forces of the personality. In order to be positive forces for constructive action, emotions must be gradually brought under voluntary self-control. Through encouragement, good adult example and positive discipline emotions can be channeled into productive behaviors that through practice become the habits of strong character.

In summary, these four principal attributes—a positive sense of self, a well-formed and active conscience, the skills of decision-making and choosing, and an array of virtuous habits—are the keystones of character. They are the wellsprings of such behaviors as honesty, respect, justice, tolerance and responsibility. They are the particular inner strengths that enable the person to be consistently good. These attributes grow and interrelate as the child grows and form the deep, complex and enduring character of the person. They are the essential foundational elements of a Christ-like character. Children may acquire knowledge of goodness and hear and be attracted to the wisdom of the Gospels. However, without the strengthening and guiding presence of these attributes, they may not be able to summon the consistent desire and will to make the practice of their faith and the invitation to follow and be like Christ a meaningful part of their lives. It follows that an effective program of character development in the Catholic school should focus on strengthening these attributes.

Character Development in the School Setting

As we examine the nature of character and its principal attributes it becomes clear that the school must reach the inner lives of children in comprehensive and meaningful ways in order to be effective in developing and strengthening character. We must be able to motivate students to be concerned about their behavior and make an effort to be good.

As a beginning, a focused character development program calls for a fresh look at the daily psycho/social structure of the school and the academic curricula it offers at the different grade levels. Our objective is to discover how we can direct the total life of the school toward forming character while, at the same time, offering a rich academic preparation. Character development cannot simply be an "add-on"—a series of projects or incidental activities. Rather, it must be a total and everyday school experience, involving some special instructions and activities and focusing on every large and small opportunity that arises to build and reinforce a good character: the way students respond to school rules and expectations; how they treat each other in class and in the halls, at lunch, at recess and on the playing fields; the respect they show for their teachers and all school personnel; the quality and completeness of the academic work they do at school and at home; the quality of the school's disciplinary code and the extent to which conduct problems are addressed in positive and constructive ways.

Everyone in the entire school community—the principal, teachers, support personnel, parish priests and families—needs to join the effort to build character in every student and fully commit themselves to use every teachable occasion to instruct, model, encourage and praise. Everything counts. To be effective, our efforts have to be age-appropriate. They should be geared to the intellectual, emotional and social growth and development of children and adolescents at the different age levels. While there is much common ground in shaping character from kindergarten through to the fourth-year high school, there will obviously be many differences in emphasis and methods used to instruct and motivate the students, due to their differing needs, interests and developing abilities. There is a peak time of readiness in children for mastering and assimilating value-based concepts and behaviors, just as there is a time of readiness to learn to read, to deal with mathematical processes and to master

athletic skills.

Character Development in the Primary Grades

There is a prime readiness in the kindergarten and primary grade child to respond to efforts to teach good habits and enhance a positive sense of self by acquiring socializing traits. These young children are immersed in the challenges of group learning situations, which present many new demands and opportunities to learn how to interact, to share and cooperate, to follow directions and to accept limits and rules. Children at this age are more malleable in terms of their personality traits and their potential to form habits than they will be at later ages. Their behavior can be modified more readily than it ever will be again. They are accessible and responsive to adult direction, they want to please and praise which is a significant motivating factor, and adult example is still a powerful teacher.

Particular virtuous behaviors to cultivate at the primary grade level are honesty, obedience, self-discipline, orderliness, respect, generosity, empathy and compassion. In primary grade children the basic elements of conscience are developing and converging, making them more aware of differences in their behavior and whether certain actions are right or appropriate. Keeping in mind that a well-formed conscience strengthens the person in the avoidance of wrongdoing and serves as a positive guide to goodness, primary teachers should emphasize the cultivation in their pupils of the desire to be a good person. Encouraging children to want to be good is an important dimension of teaching them the right and good things to do. Imagination unfolds and develops rapidly during these years. Children are deeply impressed by stories about good people and heroic deeds and these early impressions can have a lasting effect in shaping their later interests and aspirations. The Old and New Testaments are a fertile source of inspiration for young children, as are the many stories and poems from classic and contemporary children's literature.

The use of literature as a means of teaching and inspiring moral behavior continues to be an important resource throughout a student's elementary and secondary education. As they mature and acquire a greater breadth of understanding and judgment, students can learn to evaluate what they read and consider in a critical way examples of the goals, life styles and choices

of behavior their futures may offer them. Examining films and television programs can develop their maturing evaluative skills further.

These early grades are a significant time to develop empathy and compassion in children. At these ages, children are still very self-focused and they will not readily observe and respond to the individual circumstances and the needs of others without some active guidance from their parents and teachers. There are many times and ways to encourage children to acquire the habit of being aware of other children and wanting to help and share with them and occasionally give way to their preferences. This can be done during lessons in the classroom, at lunch and recess, and at home when in the company of playmates and siblings.

Character Development in the 4th, 5th and 6th Grades

The 4th, 5th and 6th grades are a prime time to develop decision-making skills and the deeper levels of conscience. Students in these middle grades are becoming capable of a broader range of higher intellectual processes. They are acquiring a deeper ability to comprehend and sort out ideas, to compare and judge them, and to relate their conclusions to new situations. This is the time to begin to move away from the practice of telling children what to do and gradually bring them into the decision-making process of exploring alternatives for behavior and weighing the consequences of possible choices before making a decision to act.

An appropriate teaching method to help children learn how to decide for themselves is the teacher-led discussion of issues that are significant to children in this age group and require decisions and choices on their part. With the help of the teacher, students can have regular practice in developing and clarifying their understanding of appropriate behavior. They can learn how to compare alternatives and why they should anticipate and prepare for the consequences of their choices. By using every opportunity to remind students to put their decision-making skills to use the teacher helps to build the habits of critical thinking. The teacher-led discussion is a very valuable method of character education from this level on through secondary school.

Learning to lead discussions with a group of children is an

important part of teacher training for character education. One of the most difficult challenges for the leader is to avoid monopolizing the discussion and preaching or lecturing to children about values and morals. Indoctrination is counterproductive because it does not engage a child's mind at a deep level nor reach the inner self. On the other hand, a productive discussion is more than simply having the students sit around in a group to air their own ideas and come up with their own solutions without teacher input and guidelines. Children need the wisdom and guidance of experienced adults. It is essential for the teacher to strike a balance between instructing and clarifying issues for students and helping them to develop their own insights for understanding and learning how to decide and choose. This is a skill that takes preparation and practice.

A good example for teaching decision-making skills is helping children to appreciate the value of doing homework well. Homework is one of the best character-building activities available in the school setting. It is an important part of a child's school life and it has the built-in element of the practice of many virtues. Under the guidance of the teacher, the students can explore: (1) the purposes, benefits and responsibilities of homework, (2) the alternatives for choices, which range from ignoring assignments or doing them poorly to doing their best possible work, (3) the consequences of their choices, and (4) the virtues in doing homework well—self-discipline, patience, responsibility and perseverance.

Another appropriate topic for a decision-making discussion at this level is competitive sports. Children are developing a stronger interest in athletic activities at this age and this provides a good opportunity to help them appreciate that there are many things involved in school sports besides having a good time and winning every game. Competitive sports have their own set of virtuous behaviors that should serve as guidelines—self-control, fairness, honesty, patience, tolerance and sharing. Students should become aware of them as soon as competitive sports are a part of the curriculum so they can be incorporated into their attitudes and their playing habits. Such discussions should be an established part of a physical education teacher's responsibilities. In view of the influence of parental example, discussing with parents their own and their children's conduct during sports activities should be a part of a school's character development efforts.

There are many other significant and interesting topics for teacher-student discussions. Some suggestions are: the choice of friends, use of leisure time, the value of a hobby, handling money, responsibilities at school, the school's code of behavior and discipline, responsibilities at home, the value of rules and limits, school and home discipline, television viewing and the value of good language. The goal of such classroom discussions is to encourage students to acquire the habit of discovering and reflecting on everything that is involved in any given situation. They can then weigh and judge the alternatives and the consequences of their choices before making a decision to act. This is an important preparation for the future.

The middle years are also a good time to revisit the issue of habit formation, since these students are now better able to understand the reasons for good habits and their long-term value. They can consider the future in a more realistic way than the primary child can. With children at this age level, discussions of good habits, why they are helpful throughout life and how they can be cultivated by setting small daily goals can be very productive.

Character Development in the Upper Grades and High School

Character building at the upper grade and high school levels involves a continuing focus on developing the basic attributes of character, taking into account that the students are now more mature and capable of more personal initiative in changing their behavior. At a time in their lives when many adolescents have self-doubts and anxieties about their futures, teachers need to continue to use every opportunity to enhance self-worth through appropriate praise, individual recognition and encouragement. Time is limited in a busy classroom, but as all teachers know, there can be rewards for even small efforts to reach emotionally needy students. The elements of conscience and good decision-making skills should be in place in the older student but much work still needs to be done by providing further instruction and guidance. While attention to habit formation and maintenance will be necessary throughout life, it is especially important for teenagers who are tempted by so many outside forces to alter or even abandon the virtuous habits they worked to acquire as younger students. The watchful teacher will continue to give

individual reminders and support.

The very significant changes in emotional and social make-up during early and middle adolescence, triggered by extensive physiological change and growth, will cause young people in the upper grades and high school to be interested in and ready to learn about relationships, among them friendships with the same and the opposite sex, dating, and sexual, love and family relationships. This is an excellent example of age-appropriate character teaching for these grades. The teacher-led discussion continues to be an important teaching method during these years. Other suitable topics include drug and alcohol use, smoking among teens, evaluating TV shows and films, work habits in after-school jobs and career preparation.

These years are the optimal time to extend and enrich the desire in the student to help and serve others by becoming involved in volunteer service projects. Students at these levels are becoming more emotionally and socially independent. They are more capable and ready to leave the more sheltered environments of home and school to become active in parish and neighborhood communities. Serving others as volunteers gives students the opportunity to experience first-hand the mutual benefits of a different kind of relationship with people who are less fortunate than they are. Paying attention to the needs of others is also a healthy balance for the intense self-preoccupation that occurs normally during the teen years. Virtuous behaviors such as understanding, compassion, generosity, kindness, loyalty, chastity, modesty, prudence, patience, sincerity and tolerance can take on new meaning at these ages.

Catholic secondary schools might want to include more direct instruction on character issues in their religion courses. A course could be structured to alternate classes in character development with classes in religious instruction. This course would serve to call student attention to the interacting relationship between character and religion and is an opportunity for the teacher to use a specific agenda tailored to the special needs and interests of adolescent students. A character development agenda for the high school level could include: the nature and relevance of character and virtues in today's world, friendship, human dignity and respect, competitive sports, love and sexuality, marriage and the family, careers and work, service to others, responsibilities to community and government, and the ideals of manhood and womanhood. Using a topical agenda al-

lows the teacher to present virtues as they are linked together and related to significant life issues. For example, a good friendship requires the practice of many virtues, including generosity, loyalty, understanding, patience, sincerity, kindness and self-sacrifice. Successful careers require responsibility, cooperation, fairness, tolerance, self-discipline and respect for others. By teaching virtues in their experiential context, they can be understood at a deeper level and are more likely to become a lasting part of a student's character. This could be especially true if the teachings are accompanied by practical applications, such as personal goal setting.

Classes in character development have to be interesting and engage the students at a personal and enthusiastic level. The earlier comments about the teaching skills required to lead productive discussions are pertinent here. Other valuable teaching tools with older students are questionnaires and essays to sharpen personal awareness and focus, role-playing situations depicting virtuous behaviors, small group discussions, student interviews and reporting, and evaluations of films, novels and newspaper articles. Keeping a journal is a valuable experience for many students since it encourages introspection and reflection on life goals.

Some schools are using an advisory system with upper grade and high school students. Students are assigned to meet regularly in small groups with a teacher/advisor for periods of fifteen minutes or so in order to discuss character issues. Many students are more comfortable in smaller groups. The advisor has the opportunity to know and relate better to the students and is able to do more individual encouragement and mentoring.

Devising a Successful Program

An important dimension of character development throughout elementary and secondary school is to encourage and guide students in assimilating the lessons of the classroom and the home in their ongoing daily behavior. This is a necessary step if desirable habits and beliefs are to become a permanent part of the person's life. A good character forms through regular use and practice of its essential elements. One vehicle for encouraging student involvement in building character is the school's code of conduct that places expectations on all of its students to respect and conform to certain standards of behavior. Meeting

the expectations of the school community in a responsible way is a valuable formative experience for students. Another resource for encouraging good behavior is the system of discipline developed by the school to deal with unacceptable behavior. Effective discipline, while addressing problematic behavior firmly and consistently, should also be an instructive and dignifying experience that encourages good behavior. A school practice that is useful from the middle grades onward is helping children to assume some personal responsibility for changing their behavior by establishing and meeting small daily goals for improvement. For example, students can be asked to select one of the virtues involved in doing homework well—responsibility, orderliness, perseverance or patience—and to try to cultivate it as a habit not only while doing homework, but also during other activities throughout the day. This is a school practice that can become a cooperative venture with the parents.

Character development is a progressive and cumulative process. Essentially, it involves a continuing focus on broadening and strengthening the basic attributes of character by using more sophisticated and age-appropriate instructions as the child advances through elementary and secondary school. Each stage of character growth builds on and depends for its success on what has been accomplished through previous efforts. Imparting the ideals of a moral life to a high school student is next to impossible without the presence of the elements of a strong character established in a child's early preschool and elementary years.

The four basic character attributes—a positive sense of self, a strong and active conscience, the skills of decision-making and choosing and an array of virtuous habits—are comprehensive and complex. Each attribute involves many separate behaviors that gradually interrelate as the child grows. It is this interacting and reinforcing relationship among these various character traits that contributes significantly to the breadth of the character structure. The praise and approval earned by good habits creates a sense of self-value and confidence in the younger child, supporting a more positive self-view. The gradual acceptance of rules and limits as an expected and necessary curb on certain behaviors contributes to self-discipline that is an important aspect of conscience formation. Even small successes in decision-making achieved by the student during the school day will support the value of critical thinking and planning ahead, impor-

tant dimensions of conscience formation. The growing awareness in a child of the success and rewards of good habits encourages more good habits, just as good behavior will foster more good behavior when given praise and approval.

In devising a successful character development program in the school setting, a thorough understanding of the nature of character and how it is formed in the developing child will be essential. The first step in teacher preparation should be to encourage this knowledge through study and faculty discussions. We can then begin to build relevant curriculums of strategies, instruction and activities that can be incorporated in a totally focused character-building environment.

Character Development and Religion

Is there a relationship between the development of a strong character, on the one hand, and loving God, possessing a devout spiritual life and participating in the liturgical practices of the Catholic Church, on the other hand? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* addresses this question: "Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberate acts and by a perseverance ever renewed in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace. With God's help, they forge character and give facility in the practice of the good. The virtuous man is happy to practice them." (Sec. 1810)

An active religious faith expressed through prayer and frequent celebration of the Eucharist will shape and reinforce a Christian character. Equally, the possession of a Christ-like character will lead a person closer to a love of God and a desire to take an active part in the rich liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. A full knowledge of goodness comes to us through reason and especially through faith. It is faith that opens the people to God's help through grace and provides the strengths required to persevere in living a Christian life.

The Catholic school is committed to join with parents in leading their children into a full understanding and practice of their religion. We teach our students that religion gives meaning to human life, reminding us of the source of our lives and our final destiny of an eternal union with God. Reflecting its Catholic identity, the Catholic school teaches the truths of religion with enthusiasm and respect and puts a strong emphasis on cultivating a love of God and Church by encouraging prayer and a consis-

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tent participation in the liturgy. Students will be enriched in their daily lives by their membership in the Church and the strength and guidance it provides in developing their personal vision of the way to salvation. In the words of Pope Paul VI, "the Church is the visible plan of God's love for humanity." For Catholics, it is the place for private and communal witness to the glory and love of God and the source of a continuing renewal of their commitment to the teachings of Christ.

The Teacher

The teacher is the pivotal and most significant person in a school-based character building program. It is the teacher who will be closest to the students throughout the school day, be the most familiar with their individual strengths and weaknesses, and be in the best position to provide consistent instruction, example, guidance and encouragement. Especially, the nature of the personal relationship between the teacher and students should be a powerful instrument for growth and change. For success in this important work of character building the teacher will depend primarily on his or her personal qualifications and professional preparation, as well as on the full support and participation of the school, family and parish communities.

Just as Christ is the model for the students, He is also the ideal and model for teachers in the Catholic school. During His life, Christ personified all of the virtues that a good teacher must practice every day—kindness, compassion, respect, patience, diligence and understanding. As a teacher, Christ was persevering and committed to the truth of His message, focusing always on the ultimate goal of salvation through faith, love and goodness on earth. The teacher in the Catholic school is committed to preparing children to achieve this ultimate goal.

The character-building responsibilities of the teacher call for a level of care and dedication that will inspire children. The teacher needs to be positive, diligent and creative in showing students how to be Christ-like in their daily behavior and leading them in a devout practice of their religion. The teacher must be knowledgeable about child development and well versed in the nature of character and the ways it can be instilled in children. As with parents, one of the teacher's most meaningful teaching tools will be his or her example as a good person who possesses and consistently models the virtues to be found in a

good character, and who instructs and encourages each student with patience and optimism to practice them. Finally, the Catholic school is committed to teaching Catholic doctrine and morality in accord with the teachings of the Catholic Church, as set forth in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. A high priority in every Catholic elementary and secondary school should be an ongoing program of moral and spiritual formation for teachers, motivating them to enrich their own lives by being virtuous and living their religious faith with commitment and devotion.

Crime, drug and alcohol abuse, abortion, childbearing outside of marriage and the breakdown of marriages have a personal impact on the lives of many of today's children. Perhaps the teacher's most difficult challenge will be talking about morality to those children who are witness to moral failures and bad behavior in people close to them whom they love and want to respect. Without compromising on the nature of goodness and morality, the teacher must show compassion and understanding for those who make mistakes in their lives, while at the same time focusing positively and constructively on the nature and rewards of good behavior. For example, the best way to help students avoid marital problems or irresponsible sexual behavior in their own lives is to give them an understanding of the nature of love and the commitments required for a full appreciation of its rewards. We want to encourage and show them how to develop the virtuous habits that will help to ensure against failure in their adult relationships and lead the way to personal fulfillment and happiness.

The Role of the Parents

Character development in children is primarily the responsibility of their parents. Efforts by the school to provide it cannot be viewed and should not be intended as a substitute for parental leadership and initiative in preparing their children to lead good lives. To be effective, the school must be able to build on strengths already present in the child when his formal education begins. A child's early years are the crucial time for parents through love and example to establish the elements of conscience, some basic empathetic responses to others, some acceptance of rules and limits, and the potential for a positive self-appraisal as a worthy person.

The school can and should play a significant role in helping

parents to develop and enhance character. Even in these challenging times, many parents successfully provide a good moral education for their children, but they look for support and reinforcement from appropriate sources outside the family, such as the school and the Church. Other parents may have good intentions, but in today's confusion and laxity about morality they don't know how to approach the challenge of character education. Unfortunately, there is still another group of parents who are too distracted by their own disordered lives to help their children. The consequent reality is that for many children their teachers in school will provide them with their most meaningful opportunities to explore the nature of goodness in any depth.

The child's early school years are the time to begin to educate the parents about the character-enhancing value of so much of what can be taught and accomplished at school and should be taught and accomplished at home as well. The primary grades are the optimal time to express clearly the nature of the partnership that has to exist between the parents and the teacher if the child is to flourish in his academic progress, in the development of his character, and in his love for God and his Catholic faith. It is the time to set the pace for all of the child's future school years, the time to establish good and regular communication, and the time to make certain that mutual responsibilities are well understood. This partnership of parents and teachers with good two-way communication and shared responsibilities will be just as relevant and necessary in 4th year high school as it is in kindergarten and first grade.

Good parenting requires a deep commitment of personal involvement and self-sacrifice. It requires time and effort. Good parenting requires physical, emotional and social involvement in the school lives of children and especially in the important work of cultivating spirituality and building character. There are many ways that parents at home can join the efforts of the teachers at school by fostering particular virtuous habits in their children. One way is to have regular family discussions about school and family issues in order to extend and reinforce classroom discussions. Another way is to establish patterns of family life and relationships that will create and support good character. The school can help parents learn more about the nature of character and how it is formed in children through readings and lectures at school. The most important message to parents will be the significance of their role in developing a Christ-like

character in their children by leading good lives themselves. Their children will learn best and profit most from daily parental examples of virtuous behavior, loving and compassionate acts toward others, a manifest love of God, and faithful and devout participation in the life and practices of the Church.

Some Conclusions

Catholic schools have always been involved in developing character in their students. Generations of teachers have worked with patience and dedication to teach the children in their classrooms to be virtuous. In many respects, a more focused and specific effort will employ the ideas and activities that they have already been used to advantage. But even greater benefits will be derived from a more consistent, interrelated and progressive effort beginning in the primary grades. Such an effort would encompass a more comprehensive rationale based on a knowledge of the nature of character, how it appears at the various developmental stages of the growing child, and the timely use of the most productive lessons and motivating activities.

In the Catholic school the concept of character should be conceived to be more than a moral compass focused on a life of human virtues and earthly happiness. Teachers in Catholic schools have the freedom to speak about the meaning and purpose of human life. They can teach their students that the ultimate goal of life is union with God for all eternity and all human behavior should be directed toward that beatific end. Christ told everyone to achieve eternal life by following Him in the observance of the two commandments of love of God and love of neighbor (Luke, 10:25-27). In this lesson and during His own life on earth, Christ described and embodied the model for a Christian character. In showing children how to live their faith and achieve salvation we cannot do better than to teach them how to live the kind of exemplary life of love and virtue that Christ Himself lived.

Every Catholic school should strive to provide an academic education of the highest quality in common with public and other private schools. But, to return to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper, the unique contributions of the Catholic school to its students should be a love of their religion and a Christ-like character to enable them to live their lives in accord with truth and goodness. These two achievements should be

the distinguishing marks of every person who has been educated in a Catholic school.

Dr. Patricia Cronin received her doctorate in clinical psychology from Loyola University of Chicago. For many years she worked in the Child Mental Health Center of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago where, in her position as psychologist and director, she had extensive contact with teachers and principals in the Archdiocesan schools. More recently she has been an author and consultant on character development curriculums for the Chicago Midtown and Metro Achievement programs.

Character Education and Our Children

Mary Sherman

Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.

Elizabeth Stone

Sixteen years ago on a rainy January morning, my husband and I sat in the recovery room of the hospital following the birth of our first son. We were doing all the things that first time parents do, counting his fingers and toes, guessing what color his hair would be and marveling at the miracle of birth, when my husband turned to me and with a sly smile on his face said, "Now, the real work begins. It's time to start letting him go."

"Now?" I replied. "Don't we have eighteen or more years before we have to do that?"

What seemed like an insensitive comment to a woman who had just endured morning sickness, nine months of pregnancy, labor and delivery was actually an affirmation of something we had discussed since we first talked about having children. Our role as parents truly begins when that new life takes its first breath. It is then that we begin preparing our child to become a responsible, loving member of society. My husband repeated that same line at the birth of each of our other three children. And each time the reality of the enormity of parenting grew.

As parents, we are the first and foremost educators of our children. Hopefully, we will be the most important voice they hear and the message we send will be echoed by others in their

lives. As long as they receive love, warmth, food and security children thrive. In the early years, it is easy to control the type of messages they receive. We determine what they read or watch, whom they play with, how late they stay up. But with each successive year the outside influences become harder to control. With each passing day our precious "pupils" become more independent and determined to do things their own way.

When my husband and I grew up in the late 50's and early '60's our mothers were "employed" at home. We arrived home from school, threw down our books and headed out to play with friends. We would show our faces back at the door only at dinnertime, when every other child in our respective neighborhoods was expected to do the same. We would spend afternoons going from house to house, to parks or to stores. Our mothers didn't need to worry about us because at every house along our journey there was another mother's eyes watching our every move. If we were ever guilty of even the slightest indiscretion everyone heard about it.

The life of a child has changed dramatically in the last half of this century and families have changed. Today, we live in a transient society where families relocate on a regular basis and the support system that was present in the past is no longer readily accessible. Where once grandparents and parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends lived near one another, now they are spread across the country and sometimes the world. The role models that children could always depend on in the past are not always physically present today in their everyday lives. As our children get older they spend more and more waking hours away from the family unit. Teachers, coaches and friends spend more time each day with our children than my husband and I do. More mothers are working outside of the home just to make ends meet. Daycare, unheard of in generations past, is now the norm for many young children. Single-parent families struggle to keep up with day to day duties. After-school activities that once involved a ball, a bat, and any child who wanted to play, have now become structured games and practices with tryouts and "cuts". Parents send children to sports camps and clinics to assure they will be able to make the team. The emotional toll on our children is often too much for them to handle.

How, as parents, do we assure that our children will develop the strong, Christ-like character that is more than ever needed in this fast-paced society? How do we raise children who are

kind, disciplined, honest, just and tolerant? We need help. We need our children to be engaged in a comprehensive program to help build character. We need role models to challenge our children to choose the right when all the outside forces of today's world are telling them to do exactly the opposite. We need to ensure that the message of the home is echoed by the influences that have taken our place.

Patricia Cronin, in her paper "Character Development in the Catholic School" states that, *"Today's moral climate is creating a need for a more intensive and coordinated effort to build character"* (Cronin, p. 2). In the past, the academic curriculum was the focus of an organized structure in the schools. Character formation was informal, though woven throughout the day in the Catholic school. Given the moral conflicts in the world today, a child must be taught more than simply by example and informal activities. A program focusing on character development that begins in kindergarten and continues throughout a child's school years is an utmost necessity. Such a program should communicate the shared responsibility of parents and the school in developing the whole child. As parents we know what a child with good character looks like. We can all identify children who have grown into responsible, productive, Christ-like adults. But how do we know that our children are being exposed to the elements and attributes of good character? It is not a gift. Character is achieved. It must be taught. Parents cannot rely on the school alone to build character. Nor should the school expect parents to be solely responsible for character development. We must work together so that virtuous behavior becomes second nature to our children.

Our family has been blessed to live in a city with a wealth of choices for educating our children. It was almost not the case. In the 1900s legislation was pending in the Pacific Northwest that would have required parents to send their children to the common, or public school. The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary challenged this tide of rising popular opinion. They filed a lawsuit to protect the right of parents to include the option of private/religious schools in that choice. Fighting all the way to the Supreme Court, the Sisters prevailed, thus ensuring our right today to choose a school that we believe can educate the soul, as well as the mind and the body.

Today, a host of studies and reports attempt to quantify the reasons that parents choose schools in the way that they do. Some

will say that parents choose a school based on the quality of its academics. Other studies list safety as the number one factor. We have seen still others that spin the data in such a way that indoctrination of a particular faith is the ideal. While each of these is important, our family's decision even in retrospect wasn't so clear. Only when formally asked the question as to why a Catholic school did it begin to come into focus.

I suspect that most families base their choice of school as we did on comfort, availability, location, friendships, and family history, as well as academics and faith formation. Providing character education would not have made the top of our quick list. Yet maybe it's all of these factors wrapped into one intangible gut feeling that provided just what we had hoped it would for each of our children. The sense that they would grow and be nurtured, just as we were, in a community which models the richness of our faith, not just indoctrination, was a powerful motivator.

We could have saved thousands of dollars and sent our four children to the public school in our neighborhood. It is a good school, filled with good people, trying to do good things. The money we invested in schooling our children could have gone to buying new cars rather than driving the old ones or paid for a family vacation to some exotic location rather than a hot, sweaty car trip to the eastern side of our state for a few days. Yet without question we would make the same decision again because the schools our children attend, Catholic schools, are not just places where they are taught a catechism or expected to recite rote answers. These schools are places where the entire community — parents, parishioners, students and staff — is invested in the dynamic experience of building individual and communal character. These schools emphasize service to others. They stress that individual talents are for the service of others rather than the individual excelling solely to.get into the "best" high school or the "best" college and subsequently get the "best" job. These schools educate the heart and soul forming in a Christ-like way attitudes, conscience and habits in our children that are in concert with our home.

As parents we hope our children will be better off than we were. We all believe that our children are "gifted" and should end up in professional careers that earn them respect and prestige. But when we tuck these sleeping angels to bed at night what

we really pray for is for them to be healthy, happy and secure in whatever the Spirit intends for them. I believe true character is living a life to the fullest for others.

In our city, nearly one quarter of the children attend a private school. I do not believe that it is because our public school district is bad. It isn't. I also do not believe that parents send their children to Catholic schools solely for their religious education. Parish programs are designed to help parents with that task. What my husband and I want, as do many of our friends, is the character building community that is only present when children are exposed daily to an environment that resonates with the home, a seamless experience of love, example and caring.

The task to develop children of good character is immense. As our parents experienced, it is something that cannot be done alone. They had the benefits of a neighborhood community tied together during an era which may not have been simpler, but was more stable and secure, slower paced, and for good or bad, less diverse. Today, our role as responsible parents feels as if we are swimming upstream and the current is getting swifter all the time. Where our parents had friends, family and neighbors, we need to rely on systems and institutions. We have chosen Catholic schools to be the bond for our children. And though the task of "letting go" of our children is as hard as it seemed the day they were born, we are confident that the character-building system has given them wings to fly and a strong foundation to keep them grounded.

Mary Sherman is a mother of four children and assistant principal at St. Mary School in the Archdiocese of Seattle.

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The Gift of Love ... The Heart of Virtue

Sr. Mary Carol Gentile, ASCJ

It is important for me to tell you what an impact St. Rocco School has made on our parish family and community. Need less to say I feel so privileged to he part of it!

As a member of the parish Friendly Visitor Program, I witness the joy of the shut-ins that I visit when I bring them the lovely gifts that your school children make for them as well as the beautiful cards and letters. Everything is filled with so much love and caring. Your students have touched the hearts of our dear elderly friends. I am also in awe of the pupils who visit the various nursing homes regularly in our community. Sharing their time and talent with these lonely and frail residents is a beautiful gift. How wonderful it is that our school not only excels academically, but spiritually. Their service to others confirms that St. Rocco School puts a strong focus on developing Christ-like students who "Share the love of the Heart of Christ," and that they bring their caring beyond the classroom.

I know I share the sentiments of so many other parishioners when I say that our school is an asset to our church and community! May our good Lord continue to bless you and your school community so that you will continue to share the love of the Sacred Heart? Kay D'Acchioli, St. Rocco Parishioner.

It is not unusual for me to get such a message acknowledging and supporting the mission and philosophy of our school as a lived reality. It is this mission that creates a loving family atmosphere and promotes Christian values and virtues among faculty, staff, students, parents and the local community. It is this mission that is the very heartbeat of St. Rocco school, creating a strong Catholic culture. It is this mission of love that is the very heart of virtue, and virtue is the heart of character development.

As we are careening toward the third Christian millennium, I am pausing to consider the grave importance of character education as an antidote to the negative influences of violence, drugs, fractured family life, apathy and indifference in society today. I believe that our Catholic schools have mirrored character education by our very call to teach as Jesus did. However, it seems necessary today to more clearly identify how character education is integrated and communicated in our Catholic elementary schools. Recent literature on character education recommends a comprehensive approach that develops character through the total moral and spiritual life of the school. In her article, *Character Development in the Catholic School*, Dr. Cronin states that, *"Character development in the Catholic school combines an education in faith and in morals by inspiring and teaching children to live as Christ lived and as Christ commanded everyone to live by loving and serving God and all of one's brothers and sisters on earth.* (p. 3) Cronin states that the objective of character education is the development of a Christ-like person based on the law of love. Her statement is central to my experience as a Catholic elementary school educator today.

My reflection on Dr. Cronin's paper focuses on this gift of love as the heart of virtue that is character education. The mission statement of St. Rocco School reads, *"The mission of St. Rocco School is rooted in the love of the Heart of Christ. We are committed to academic excellence and the development of Christian values that generates responsible character preparing students to meet the challenge of the 21st century."* To capture the spirit of the mission we have used the phrase "Sharing the Love of the Heart of Christ". For clarity and brevity, throughout this reflection I will be referring to this phrase as our mission.

My experience is that our mission is the heart of all efforts at character education and integral to all aspects of curricular and extra-curricular activities. Love is the virtue that helps children grow into the person of Jesus Christ, our model and our mentor. It is the virtue of love that is the impetus for the process of transformation into the Christ-like person we were called to be at our baptism. This transformation comes about by our encounter with Jesus in the sacramental life of the church, as well as by our encounter of the person of Jesus in one another.

Our mission of love at St. Rocco School has been the driving force for fostering Christ-like virtues such as caring, compassion, generosity, helpfulness, understanding, tolerance, and co-

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operation. It is obvious to parents, school board members, parishioners and local community that as a school community we stress the cultivation of a strong, religious character. Recently a school parent shared with me her impression of the values our school has taught her daughter.

"St. Rocco School shows itself to be developing strong, moral character in its students by guiding them to be responsible, caring Christians. The children are encouraged to help each other and work hard to achieve their goals. They are taught to be honest and responsible for their actions. There is a strong emphasis on doing what is right no matter how challenging. They are guided to accept each other's differences, remembering that we are all children of God. The school itself is decorated with a multi-cultural theme, celebrating peace among people. The walls are covered with photographs of many of our students working, playing and sharing together. The school curriculum includes community service projects to make the children mindful of how much they have to share, and how the community needs them." (Linda Cournoyer, Parent)

The following are a few of the many ways we integrate character education into the total school program mirroring our mission of love and the call of the Gospel to live the great commandment, "Love One Another."

- *Prayer and Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.* Sharing personal prayer, para-liturgical celebrations and liturgies constitute the very heart of our school. By celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation and First Friday Liturgies children learn that the sacraments are at the heart of our efforts to help them grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Teaching children to pray and develop a personal relationship with Jesus is the root and foundation of their moral development. Our students' spirit of generosity flows from their prayer and is nurtured and supported by their parents who are their primary educators. Parents wholeheartedly participate in the many spiritual activities offered throughout the year St. Rocco School. As part of the school's mission, students learn about devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and discuss how this devotion can be a lived reality in their daily lives. This is the foundation for their collaborative efforts at creating their own classroom standards and exploring appropriate consequences when these standards are transgressed. Faculty meetings and faculty in-service days afford teachers time to pray, study and learn more about the spirit of the mission. As role models and

mentors for students, I believe that teachers exert a positive influence on character development by setting the example for personal and communal prayer. Their genuine love, respect and care for students as individuals affirms this belief.

- *A School Theme to Promote Character Development.* Each year a school theme is chosen that relates to the school mission, and reflects an approach to character education that is identified, integrated and communicated to all school constituents. This year's theme is, " We are God's family of peacemakers, united in hands and hearts." Visible reminders are evident throughout the school, in parent and school board newsletters, and in the parish bulletin. A school parent who makes jewelry created 500 pins of a heart in a hand and each student wears one as a reminder of our theme. Each month a virtue is emphasized to promote character development and understanding of common values related to peacemaking. Teachers talk to students about this virtue and connect it to classroom experiences. Parent newsletters offer suggestions for promoting the virtue at home and ways to involve the family in the understanding of the month's virtue. Parents are at the very heart of our school and, as much as possible, they encourage and reinforce the virtue in the family. The Student of the Month is the one who best models the virtue of the month. Schoolwide morning prayer addresses the virtue and relates it to being a peacemaker in the classroom, at lunch and recess, at home, and in the larger local and global communities. A multicultural school wide interdisciplinary unit explores the cultures and traditions of different countries, and sharpens students' understanding of all peoples in direct correlation to our school theme about becoming peacemakers.
- *Partnering With Other Schools.* Through the efforts of the Johnston Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force, St. Rocco School enjoys an ongoing partnership with the Rhode Island School for the Deaf. This Sister School Project has received national recognition and enhances our efforts to include disabled populations in the mainstream of our community. Since the project began, students from St. Rocco School have learned sign language. Throughout the year students from both schools experience cooperative activities, such as wrapping Christmas gifts for needy children, engaging in athletic activities, and socializing at middle school dances. Each spring middle school students participate in a three-day camp with

the hearing impaired, affording students the opportunity to establish stronger ties with one another. This partnership teaches students not only to accept each other's differences but to celebrate them as well.

- *Community Service.* Students in the Middle School participate in a Community Service Learning program and are released one afternoon a month to visit community agencies. Students learn the value of community service in their own lives and actively participate to improve the quality of life for our elderly residents. Many elderly people have no relatives or are shut-ins and, lacking a means of transportation, face isolation from the community. Students also participate in a companion program Kids Involved in Government (KIG), in which they learn about civic awareness on local and state levels. Students have the opportunity to explore cultural diversity through involvement with Genesis Center, a center for Cambodian, Vietnamese and Hmong children who are newly arrived in America. During Advisory meetings, students discuss their community experiences and publish a community service newsletter, *Serving Others With Love (SOWL).* All these activities teach children about caring beyond the classroom.
- *Good Deeds Program for the Younger Children.* Children at the early childhood and elementary levels participate in a Good Deeds Program sponsored by a Rhode Island Philanthropist, Alan Shaw Feinstein. Children write daily in their Good Deeds Journal donated by Mr. Feinstein. In all disciplines teachers integrate the good deeds theme into their teaching. One student writes, *"I like the Feinstein Journal because it helps me to be more aware of helping others. I can even see an improvement in my friends because they are trying to be more courteous and kind to each other..."* (Kristen DiRaimo, Student). A parent writes, *"... by making my children aware of doing good deeds daily, my sons have become more conscious about family, community and the world. For example, while grocery shopping, my children will remind me to purchase canned goods for the needy; they readily shovel snow for the neighbor without expecting or accepting money in return; and the boys are more sensitive about social issues when watching TV."* (Robin Okolowitcz, Parent). As a result of the Good Deeds Program and the emphasis on "Sharing the love of the Heart of Christ," canned goods are brought in almost daily and the children have become very thoughtful about the needs of others. This validates our efforts at character development and

education

- *School "Families".* In the spirit of our mission of love and as part of our program to foster growth in Christ-likeness, students are grouped into "families" consisting of 18 students from grades K-8. After an initial "Getting to Know You" in the early part of the school year, "families" meet for an afternoon four times a year during the seasons of Thanksgiving, Advent, Lent and Easter. Their time together begins and ends with prayer. They engage in a hands-on liturgical activity, usually making something they can send to the local nursing homes and to parish shut-ins. Volunteer parents join the gathering to pray with the children and help with projects. This activity helps to create the school-wide moral community suggested by Dr. Thomas Lickona as a component of a comprehensive approach to character development. This effort seeks to help all students manifest the character of Jesus Himself. It seeks to model à moral and spiritual community in which all members care for one another.
- *Peer Mediation Program.* A Peer Mediation Program with middle school students encourages them to develop respect for each other, enables them to become problem solvers, and helps them make decisions in light of the school's mission. The program encourages personal responsibility for one's actions, which has helped to decrease the number of altercations between children.

Catholic schools do make a difference where it counts. As I noted previously, I believe that character education is inherent in our Catholic schools mission and philosophy. We need to continue to clearly identify, integrate and communicate how our character education programs contribute to the moral and spiritual life of the school. With Jesus Christ as our model and mentor, we continue to challenge our students to live Christ's two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor. The act of love forms the foundation of character education.

Sister Mary Carol Gentile is the principal of the U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School St. Rocco in the Diocese of Providence. Sister Carol is also a National Distinguished Principal.

Character Education: Reflections from a High School Principal

John Hoffman

The recent increased attention to the concept of "charac ter" is welcomed and refreshing. There are, however, at tendant risks as we attempt to accomplish the goals of character development in our children. In the particular area of secondary education, we have seen a number of benefits from the renewed interest in building character. From the perspective of a high school administrator, this paper reflects on those benefits as they pertain to:

- the curriculum of religious studies, especially in the area of ethics,
- values in extra-curricular activities, and
- the role of service education in the high school setting.

Benefits: Teaching the Whole Person

A teaching career that began almost thirty years ago as an instructor in English and Religion provides a useful vantage point from which to see ways in which character education has been a valuable corrective in the high school ethics curriculum. When I began teaching, many high school ethics classes tended to focus on "decision-making" and providing methods and examples for addressing the question: "What's the right thing to do?" in a particular situation. To bring clarity, rationality and coherence to the decision-making process of high school students was unquestionably a worthy goal. Our students profited from the rigor of close analytical dissection of case studies and hypothetical problems. Most students were able to leave our ethics classes

with increased skills in and an appreciation for what one should do in this specific situation, what might be called "micro-ethics."

Such gains were achieved at some considerable loss. For one thing, we tended to create the illusion that the decision-making process was simply algorithmic, a fixed set of intellectual procedures that, if properly followed, would yield the correct results as certainly as following cookbook recipes would yield culinary delights. Indeed, for years I used an ethics textbook loaded with case studies that culminated in a one-page flow-chart summary of all the necessary steps to a good moral decision. Inevitably, the focus on decision-making as an analytic procedure tended to imply that ethics and moral judgment could be reduced to a form, albeit a sophisticated one, of cost-benefit analysis. Rather than challenging our culture's unconscious dependence on utilitarian simplification, we were indirectly supporting it. Similarly, the fairly constant attention given to moral dilemmas and crisis situations—"the lifeboats and death camps" approach—gave our students the implicit message that the moral life was a minefield of regular and frequent hazards. Little wonder that many of our students sought the psychic relief of capitulating to relativism. After all "who's to decide" such impossibly difficult cases? We gave less attention to finding the reality of grace in the very "dailyness of life."

More recently, we have seen a valuable corrective as the significance of "macro-ethics" has been restored in many ethics classes. The question, "Who is the person I am called to be?" brings a necessary balance to the decision-making approach described above. That question leads quite directly to the more properly theological stance: I am called by a gracious and generous God to share a discipleship in grace with a believing community. As students ask and reflect on the issue of their identity and vocation, they are led to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of grace, sin and forgiveness. In the decision-making model alone, it is too easy for rational analysis to be corrupted into moral rationalization. That is, the rationalizing mind can always find or invent "the greater good" to justify virtually any action. An honest sense of who we are and whom we are called to be provides the counter-balance to help us avoid that danger.

Character education in ethics is especially helpful in that its focus on the *"... configuration of attitudes, abilities and habits that shape and govern behavior in accord with objective standards"* (Cronin,

p. 4), establishes a conceptual bridge. When we look at the elements of character, we are bringing together the concerns of both micro- and macro-ethics. To dwell only on particular decisions runs all the risks of the cost-benefit analysis method already mentioned. Yet, to concentrate only on identity and vocation runs the very real danger of becoming lost in abstraction and mired in platitudes. "Be perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect" is a powerful statement of a moral ideal that speaks volumes about human identity, yet it yields little guidance for the specific and concrete situation.

The concept of character and the virtues that are the manifestations of a well-formed character allows us to bring together the two poles of the general ideal and the particular decision. When we consider a specific case from the perspective of what a person of character exhibiting the virtue of courage (or honesty or compassion, etc.), would do in a given circumstance, we are adopting an approach that allows the close analysis of the particular case within the horizon of our moral calling.

When we step outside of the classroom into the larger life of the school community, we find that for many of our students the locus of their greatest enthusiasm, passion and dedication is the arena of extra- or co-curricular activities. Without rehearsing all of the reasons why extra-curricular activities are so vital to the development of our students, it is possible to recognize a simple but crucial point: Where so much passion, enthusiasm and dedication are present, there is the opportunity for character education. Inevitably, the teaching moments emerge. Sports programs are occasions for moral insight and growth because coaches can ask their athletes to reflect on point-shaving scandals or the ethics of college recruiting. Much more importantly, student athletes are asked every day to exhibit the good character traits of discipline, peer support, integrity, and loyalty in a hundred small ways. The wise coach seizes those opportunities to help her students see the centrality and importance of those traits.

Similarly, the role of the teacher in character education is greatly enhanced when they are engaged in extra curricular activities. The math teacher may not see the need nor easily find the occasion to encourage moral reflection in the algebra class. However, the same teacher engaged in directing a drama production, will find opportunities to have students reflect on the importance of being prepared and prompt, supportive and encouraging to other čast members, and grateful for the work of

the stage manager and the lighting crew. This may be so obvious as to be overlooked, but I suspect that the most frequent opportunities for serious thought and discussion about matters of character occur when teachers and students are engaged in extra-curricular activities.

Service programs provide an especially important venue for character education. Many of the objectives of such programs are explicitly moral: giving students the occasion to see and meet the needs of those living on the margins of society; providing the possibility of companionship to people in different social, economic or physical circumstances; and reminding students of the need to repay the larger community which has nurtured them. Service programs also fulfill cognitive needs because there is a different kind of thinking that becomes possible when students have direct experience with people in need. A healthy frustration emerges in the mind of the young person who, having worked at the soup kitchen for eight straight weeks, realizes that Mr. Johnson is still homeless. This is when good will and charitable endeavor are no longer sufficient and the student is likely to think more seriously about institutional and structural causes of injustice.

Further, service programs provide the clearest opportunities for the students to recognize the institutional commitment of the school and the personal commitment of its faculty and staff to the work of building the kingdom. When the school commits time, staff and enthusiasm to the service program with the same quality of conviction that is given to the history class and the basketball team, the students can't help but recognize the importance of that commitment. And when the history teacher and basketball coach are working alongside the students at the community center or the soup kitchen, the personal witness of those adults provides a more lasting image of what it means to be a person of character than any essay or lecture.

Certainly there are many other ways in which character education benefits and enhances the life of the high school. However, these examples in the classroom, in activities and in service may well suffice to make a key point: the concept of character education provides an integrating principle which allows us to see that all of the activities of the school contribute to the shared mission of nurturing character development, of educating the whole person.

Risks: Educating the Older Brother

While the benefits of a renewed emphasis on character education are most welcome especially in the secondary school context, in the spirit of "two cheers for character," it is equally important to be attentive to the dangers or risks inherent in this emphasis.

The goal of developing people of character or of "raising good persons" is clearly desirable. In this respect, those of us in the Christian, especially Catholic, tradition share an objective which transcends religious, cultural and societal boundaries. Indeed, who could question such a goal? Along with the family, every educational institution participates in establishing strong societal foundations insofar as we succeed in raising good persons. As our children and students grow into responsible adulthood, we expect to see the growing manifestation of all those virtuous habits which are attributes of persons of good character—responsibility, perseverance, prudence, orderliness, sincerity, generosity, tolerance, justice and loyalty.

And yet, could developing good persons be insufficient? A famous and familiar story from scripture imposes itself here, that of an older brother who challenges his father with the words, "All these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders" (Luke 15:11 – 32). The gospel writer gives us no reason to believe that the older brother is anything other than he claims to be -- a good person, a person of character. Nonetheless, he has misunderstood the nature of the forgiving love of God. That love is universally available as a gift, not as a reward which can be earned. In this respect, our good behavior is not what we do in order to "achieve" God's love. Rather, our moral life flows out of a recognition of being loved and graced. How else should one act, how else could one act, who is loved so fully by our God?

It is possible that an emphasis on the ethics of character can cause us to fail to see and appreciate the ethics of grace. The fact that we are so graciously gifted constitutes the fundamental moral demand, the call to discipleship and the command to love one another as the Father has loved. The very possibility of being persons of character only exists because we have been invited and called through grace. When character is presumed to be something we achieve and earn on our own, we can become blind and insensitive to the surplus of "love overflowing in our

hearts" (Romans 5:5).

An emphasis on character development need not lead to a loss of appreciation for the gratuitous character of the love of God. Nonetheless, so many of the attributes of character—the habits or virtues—come to full being through discipline, conscientious effort and hard work. For young children a reward-and-punishment model of morality is a normal phase of growth. Which of us, as parents, has not at least implied that our continued love for our children is a reward for their continued good behavior? Little wonder that they imagine the reward of our love is the earned product of their effort and hard work. It is also little wonder if they come to understand the love of God as following this same dynamic.

The risk that we may be too successful in "educating the older brother" is not a risk that can simply be removed. Rather, as Christians, we live with the tension of trying to be persons of character at the same time as recognizing that all of our efforts are made possible by grace. Similarly, as educators, we must balance our work in character development with recognition of the reality of grace in the lives of our students. In my experience, the most successful forum for allowing students to see the surplus of grace in their lives and to savor the gifts of a gracious God is through a program of student retreats. In the retreat context, genuine opportunities for self-examination become possible allowing students to identify the multiple ways in which the mystery of God's love is present in their lives. In my own experience, I have found the KAIROS retreat used and developed by many of the Jesuit high schools, to be especially helpful in this regard. The combination of peer leadership, authentic use of Ignatian sources for self-examination, and significant expenditure of time for the retreat seems to be effective in nurturing an atmosphere conducive for students to discern the signs of God in their lives.

John Hoffman formerly taught religion, coached and directed the community service program at Gonzaga College High School in Washington, DC, presently serves as principal of Monroe Catholic High School in the Diocese of Fairbanks, AK.

A Perspective from a Religious Educator

Kimberly Klugh

Woven throughout collections of Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoons is that highly imaginative and free-speaking six-year-old's view of character formation. As far as Calvin is concerned, whenever he must spend time doing something he dislikes or finds himself in situations that make him temporarily miserable, he is told unequivocally by his father that "it builds character." Not surprisingly, Calvin's definition takes on the rather negative connotation that building character is hard work and Calvin, in his childhood, has not yet reached the level where he desires to do good. Given our human condition, choosing to do right does not come naturally. All the more reason to find daily ways to cultivate character in the students whom we teach.

If we were to confess, children and adults alike, we would probably concede that most of the time we know what we should do because we have a conscience, but we do not always feel like doing the right thing. However, neither our emotional nor our spiritual growth can be based solely on our feelings. Consequently there are times when the sense of obligation takes over and determines our actions. It is all right for students to be driven out of a sense of duty for it serves as practice and helps build up discipline in their lives. The more often children do the right thing the more often they will want to do the right thing. The goal is for that sense of duty or obligation to be replaced with genuine desire, or as one of our teachers so poignantly explained, *"When you feel the power after you've done something you know is good and right, it is a feeling like no other. You learn to crave that feeling until it consumes your life. I teach by trying to live that*

feeling...trying to get them (my students) to crave it as much as I do."

Character formation is not a frill or merely an enrichment lesson in a Catholic school. If our claim is that we educate the whole child—mind and spirit—we must ask ourselves if as educators we exhibit the Spirit of Christ to the children entrusted to us. Are our lives truly illumined by Christ and are we open to the daily prompting of the Holy Spirit? We can ask no more of our students than we ourselves are willing to do. Character building is challenging work. It demands consistency, relies on strong role models, and is grounded in the hope that seeds planted in the home are nurtured in the school environment and will eventually come to fruition in each child's life.

We are always in a state of flux, a state of becoming who God wants us to be. Our character reflects how we embrace life and its many challenges and how we treat our relationships. It establishes our habits, influences our decisions and serves as the basis for the way we respond to life. Our character is the very core of our being and is imprinted on our soul. We should take the responsibility of helping to form each student's character quite seriously. As their teachers our mission is to provide them with a safe community in which they can believe in their own goodness, practice compassion for their neighbor, reflect and examine their conscience, and be surrounded by examples of virtuous living.

Every generation has had its temptations and its manifestations of evil. Today, as in the past, children are impressionable and vulnerable to the world's distractions. However, today's youth are assaulted by the media's steady bombardment of flashy messages and imposed values to a greater degree than ever before. The conflict between need and want is fueled by the rampant seduction of materialism and self-centered living. Without a solid character base how can we expect our students not to imitate the world around them? How can they possibly withstand the blitz of advertising, the lure of the Internet, MTV, R-rated videos, and morally devoid television programs if their religious instruction is based only on the memorization of textbook answers to the same questions every year? It is our role as Catholic teachers to help them embrace a faith that *is "... living, conscious, and active. This integration of religious truth and values with life distinguishes the Catholic school from other schools"* (To *Teach as Jesus Did*, sections 106, 105). We need the trimmings of our faith and the force of the Truth behind them to be most effec-

tive—*"Our personal witness is what brings the content of the lessons to life."* (*Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, section 96)

When we appropriately personalize our own faith journeys we may touch students without even realizing it. Sharing our stories is an excellent tool that can show instead of tell and can instantly build rapport. When we show that we are human and learn from our mistakes, we create a trusting climate that enables our students to be more receptive to the ethical standards we want to pass on. Our third grade teacher shares a story from her childhood when she tells her students she once stole candy from a store. When her mother found out, she had to return to the store and confess to the owner. This event obviously had a profound impact on her and opens the door to a powerful lesson she uses in the classroom.

The teachers of St. Leo the Great School employ a variety of strategies within their individual classrooms from pre-school through eighth grade. Because we cannot compartmentalize the development of our students' faith, the means by which we instill these lessons is not limited to the time we spend in religious instruction. We began the new school year with a plan to recognize and promote good manners and good deeds. When a teacher observes an act of kindness or respectful behavior, the student's name and deed are written a paper dove and the dove is mounted on a prominent bulletin board. Several of our teachers have reported that they use verbal rewards when they witness courtesy and spontaneous good behavior among their students. This public praise encourages others to do the same.

Even though the newspapers and many magazines sensationalize inappropriate behavior, there are publications that promote every day heroes. These are the folks who receive no awards (nor do they want to) for standing up for what they believe or committing a selfless act. A few of our teachers include current event assignments that direct students to bring in articles featuring these heroes to serve as a springboard for quality class discussion.

One of our teachers directs her students to bully-proof their class. She encourages them to brainstorm and decide on a list of four to five statements that are written on a poster. This poster becomes the class measuring stick and is used throughout the year to discuss behaviors that may or may not be appropriate. This year the same teacher asked her students to compose the

ten class commandments. They will then discuss these when they are kept and when they are broken.

Due to all the conflicts students and teachers may encounter throughout the day, the need for forgiveness is paramount. Admitting when we are wrong is at the base of character formation. In order to inspire our students to take that risk and ask forgiveness for wrong doing, we must provide an emotionally safe place for them in our classroom communities. We teach that if we want God to forgive us, we must forgive others. Through reconciliation, students experience conversion that in turn grants them the courage to try again: "Whenever we meet the Lord in the Sacraments, we are never left unchanged." (*Religious Dimensions of Education in Catholic Schools*, section 79)

Teachers at St. Leo the Great strive to make our students aware of what it means to be of good character. Children need to hear and define the following virtues in order to aspire toward them: honesty, integrity, compassion, generosity, moderation, courage, perseverance, moral responsibility, charity, justice and loyalty. If these are seen merely as lofty, abstract ideals, that is what they will remain. Students must develop a sense of ownership of these virtues before they can work toward living them. These virtues and their antitheses come to light quite naturally in the wealth of literature that is available to our children in the classroom, the school library and in many of their homes. Bible stories, fables, myths, biographies, fairy tales, and novels are full of characters depicting both good and evil qualities. Reading lists compiled by our librarian and curriculum coordinators expose students to the rich lessons these stories can tell. These characters and their respective actions and attitudes are referred to and used in class discussion repeatedly.

The children at St. Leo the Great are invited to give of themselves in a variety of ways that take them beyond the school environment. Their willingness and enthusiasm to band together to serve others in need is one of their greatest strengths. Many of our service projects are strongly supported by a high level of parental involvement and could not be carried out so fully without their commitment. Every Thanksgiving our students join with the community in collecting "Coats for Kids," a project spearheaded by a local television studio. Many families donate new or outgrown coats that are dry-cleaned free of charge by participating cleaners and distributed local children in need of a winter coat.

Last year during Lent our third graders collected "Nails for Jesus" and donated them to Habitat for Humanity. The local director visited the class and explained the mission of their program so the children had a clearer idea of how the nails would be used and why they were needed. Several years ago our students participated in a school wide book drive to help stock and decorate a small school library in Micronesia. Our contact person was a young woman from our parish who was a teacher in the Peace Corps and stationed there at the time. We quickly and happily accumulated far more than she expected.

Our seventh grade takes part in a yearly tradition originated by the seventh grade teacher. The students create "bunny baskets" out of plastic containers and fill them with an assortment of candy. They donate them to residents living at a local shelter in time for Easter. For the past two years students and their families have been asked to bring in baby gifts to benefit Heart to Heart, an organization that helps young, many times unmarried mothers, who choose to keep their babies.

When children are given opportunities to give beyond their school world to the community at large, they come a little closer to learning that they can help in some way and that what they do does matter. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, or showing compassion to the poor takes on a whole new meaning when there are human faces attached. Students begin to make the connection that loving one's neighbor is a commandment from Christ and a privilege.

A good friend recently reminded me that life is a process and we cannot expect changes to occur overnight just because we want them or even need them to. So it is with the process of character formation. Consistent modeling, repetition and tireless encouragement do not guarantee success. No matter what we do there are always stumbling blocks and disappointments. But this is where being a Catholic school differs from public school when it comes to character formation, our hope for conversion lies in the very real power of Christ and His promised grace.

Two centuries ago Edmund Burke said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing." In sharing some thoughts about his ministry with junior high students, one of our teachers concurred with Burke's statement that *"...our most important role in this school is to be strong witnesses to our faith. If our students are going to survive out there they*

need to know that they are not alone. The best encouragement I received this past year was when I saw my students do something for His glory, and they didn't know I saw them. These students cared enough to help someone, and no one knew but them. I think some of them got a taste of what it is to serve Christ, and I hope they begin to crave it." So do I.

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Kimberly Klugh is the school coordinator of religious education at St. Leo the Great School in the Diocese of Harrisburg.

A Reflection from a Superintendent of Schools

William Carriere, FSC, Ph.D.

Upon being asked to write a reflection on Dr. Patricia Cronin's wonderful paper on character development in Catholic schools, my first thoughts aligned with two of her questions: What should the distinctive and unique contributions of the Catholic school be to its students? What should be different about our students? Given that "today's moral climate is creating a need for a more intensive and coordinated effort to build character," we also ask what should we as professionals, along with the parents, be doing? I offer the following for your consideration.

The purpose of a Catholic school education is the living of the faith within that environment so that the graduating senior will be committed to living the faith as an adult. Everyone connected with the Catholic school community understands that structures, curricula and all related activities, integrate this faith experience into the every day life of the student. Through these structures and activities, we teach young people to be good, to be of good character, and to be people of faith.

Many people today remember that at one time society, family, Church, school and the civic community were pretty well together on what it meant to be good. A young person's contacts with adults in different settings helped him or her discover that there was a consistency in the beliefs about virtuous behavior. The effort to form a conscience in young people was done in a similar manner by all involved. Today the effort is hardly the same. Young people come to the Catholic schools with a variety of thoughts on moral behaviors and attitudes. Indeed, pressured by the "society" in which they find themselves, it is hard for them to find consistency among the adults as to what is good,

what motivates a person to be good, and why be good? One of the hardest realities some of our young students often have to deal with is the real dichotomy between what they hear and witness from their parents and peers and what they are told in Religion classes, campus ministry experiences, and in Catholic school counseling sessions. Therefore, as persons of faith we believe that being good and pursuing that behavior is natural, God-given and a genuine desire on the part of all humans. Students need to learn how to decide between good and unacceptable behavior and actively develop the ability to make right, moral decisions that encourage good traits and behaviors.

Catholic schools should exemplify the kind of care-giving that students hopefully experience early in their lives from their parents. They should learn what it feels like to trust someone and that trust will be invaluable in the daily lessons of life experiences. Administrators, teachers, and staff are responsible for behaviors that reflect Jesus' own behavior with every person with whom He came in contact Giving the proper attention, nurturing, and respect due each student without reservation helps to create an atmosphere in which students will trust adults. Once trust is established through daily experiences in and out of classrooms, students will begin to understand what it means to be people of character; they will begin to know how to make right choices. It is clear that the development of a virtuous character depends on the family's initial training and the learned skills of the school personnel who are assisting in this development.

Today one does not have to look very far to realize that we are not living in the most value oriented society. The daily challenges that confront our students often militate against our efforts at being counter-cultural. In school we may tell them one thing while outside of school is quite another experience. Some would suggest that the problem of helping kids cope with today's society is monumental. They ask, why try to combat what the students witness daily from some of their peers, through the media, through prominent people who fail, and at this horrific time of violence everywhere at every age level? It is going to be through the concerted efforts of our schools to teach the "right rules of living" that students will learn to think differently about a society that could be and will acquire the skills to be people of good character.

When I visit schools I tell teachers that I am interested in

what they are saying and in how they are saying it. I watch the interaction of the students with the teachers carefully. I pay particular attention to those moments when I can clearly witness the integration of faith and culture. I make every effort to visit the total school community, viewing different activities at different times. This provides me with plenty of opportunity to see first-hand what is happening in terms of helping students make right choices, be good persons, and become people "...who love and serve their Creator and all others well." (Cronin, p. 3)

In developing an integrated, Catholic curriculum educators always keep foremost in their minds that whatever is designed to be taught meets the needs of the students and is age-appropriate. While this is a challenge, it is most important in the area of character development. Students need to sense at the earliest stages the importance of what is being taught. Curricula must be developed that exemplifies the integration of behaviors and traits that reflect goodness.

A program for character development must be as deliberately planned and implemented as are all of the school's other curriculum and program areas, because such a program is at the heart of Catholic school philosophy. It is important to reiterate that administrators, teachers and staff must be consciously aware that they model what is the best in adult behavior so that students learn behavior patterns that teach them how to interact with one another and with adults. It is no small matter to be a model, and at all times. Students are very perceptive in this area because they fully expect adults to model what they teach and preach.

Religion content and formation are prime examples of opportunities to help students become people of good character. Religion is supposed to be a lived experience. While content is taught, it is the daily practice of a spiritual life that assists in the development of character in teaching students how to be good. The Religion curriculum permeates the entire life of the Catholic school. It is the primary reason for the existence of these schools and must be carefully designed to give all students the lived experience of faith. All too often prayer in the classroom becomes routine and the students lose the sense of its importance. If we believe that "an active religious faith expressed through prayer ... will shape and reinforce a Christian character," (Cronin, p. 14), then it seems to me we must be careful about

the prayer experience and create an atmosphere that stresses the importance of this activity.

There is no magic to time in a learning situation and like all learning situations, students respond in different ways. If we help students realize that God's grace will help them be good, we must give them time for prayer and for quiet, reflective prayer moments. Today, we are so hurried that we forget about the need for quiet reflection, which provides students with time to think about themselves. Directed by an adult, moments of quiet reflection give students the opportunity to think about their behavior and how it impacts their life and the lives of those around them. Prayer and quiet moments are golden chances to develop character.

As an important component of a consistent, coordinated effort for character development, I am concerned that many of our professionals do not necessarily receive the type of preparation that provides them with the knowledge and methods to teach character education. As Dr. Cronin points out, in the past teachers relied on their own judgment and talents, but such cannot be the case today. Ideally, we want educators and parents who are prepared to teach our young people about character and be models of good character development themselves. I talk to our administrators about the "right fit" in choosing and hiring personnel to reflect the lifestyle of a well-integrated person of faith and much of the orientation agenda is on this topic. Yet, there is much more to be done. I am in perfect agreement with Dr. Cronin's statement that:

Everyone in the entire school community—the principal, teachers, support personnel, parish priests, and families—needs to join the effort to build character in every student and commit themselves to use every teachable occasion to instruct, model, encourage and praise. Everything counts. (Cronin, p. 11)

Diocesan school office personnel will need to be involved in the training of teachers and staff. Many of our professionals are coming to us with a basic background in teacher education, but they come mostly from universities that do not provide the religious background they will need to effectively work in character development in our schools. This training must be viewed as a priority by the diocesan office and the local school administrators. Suggestions for such programs would include regular in-services, formal classes, and other such meetings.

The classroom is the most natural place for character building to take place. Teachers are called to have and to display a real love of the students. This is a serious relationship and a serious obligation. Using Christ as the model, teachers must reflect a positive manner in all dealings with the students as well as act with kindness and respect for all of them. The key word in this is *all*. The weakest, the least appealing, the most obnoxious demand and deserve the same kindness, compassion and respect as all others. William Bennett in *The Book of Virtues* clues us in to a typical classroom activity, which could assist teachers in this process: Character traits can be learned and internalized through stories. Bennett suggests that students discern the moral dimensions of historical events, famous lives, and so forth. In analyzing such events we encourage critical thinking, moral decision-making and right judgments. This approach would work for all age levels. It is important for the administration, faculty and staff to develop a plan to cultivate certain behaviors at the different grade levels. As stated in Dr. Patricia Cronin's paper, group discussions on important issues in the lives of the students are very productive.

One of the hallmarks of the research on Catholic schools is the partnership that exists between parents and school personnel. Parents quite often wish to discuss their understanding of the partnership between the school and the family and what it actually means in practice. There is no doubt that a major effort at a proper partnership between parents and school personnel must be in the area of character development. At this time in our history, home and school need to be together here more than anywhere else in school life. An important topic for general parent meetings should be: How are we doing at home and in school in helping students "through the daily practice of virtuous behaviors ... become open to forming a close relationship with God?" (Cronin, p. 1)

The Church teaches that parents are the primary educators of their children. Our schools provide an opportunity to assist parents in this responsibility and school personnel augment what the parents are doing already especially in the area of character development. Therefore, in this regard, there must be "like-mindedness". The school takes on the obligation to foster a relationship with the parents that clearly demonstrates to the students that all of the adults in their family and school agree

about the virtues that must be learned. I believe with Cronin that, "efforts by the school to provide it [character development] cannot be viewed and should not be intended as a substitute for parental leadership and initiative in preparing their children to lead good lives." (Cronin, p. 21) The partnership required on the part of school personnel is to build on what has already begun in the home. Conflicts arise where this is not happening and where it becomes clear that the school and the parents differ. School personnel have a wonderful opportunity to help the parents fully understand their desire to develop virtuous behavior in the students. Since there are different experiences among our parents, the reality is that the students "most meaningful opportunities to explore the nature of goodness in any depth" will rest with school personnel, particularly in the classroom.

The responsibility to develop character in the students is so important that the very structures of a Catholic learning center must be built around this aim. Every activity should be designed so that those "distinguishing attributes" of character—positive self worth, a well-formed and active conscience, the skills of decision-making and choosing, and the practice of virtuous habits—are instilled from the very beginning of a student's experience with us. We know that students even at an early age can understand that some standards cannot be compromised; that these personal standards are correct whether or not they meet the approval of others. As the student matures we should also recognize that personal standards are being integrated into daily practice. Schools need to develop structures where students have the opportunity to practice what is taught under the guidance of the adults. Activities that provide students with opportunities to make their own decisions without an adult witness are essential to test the hoped-for internalization of the standards by the students. These activities should be a regular part of the total program on all levels.

Consistent ongoing programs will produce students who are more conscious of their obligations to themselves and to others. Hopefully, they will be models of a different way to behave in society. All of us in Catholic education must be committed in a more dramatic way to assist our parents in this "renewed call for character." (Cronin, p. 1)

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Brother William Carriere, FSC, Ph.D., is Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Orange

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A Perspective from a Catholic/University Educator

Mary Peter Traviss, O.P.

Dr. Cronin presents a paper on character development that offers concrete suggestions to Catholic educators at all levels. She obviously believes that the development of character is amenable to educational intervention. The trick is to discover how best to intervene. Her comprehensive work is eclectic in nature and focused on a host of strategies from the various schools of thought related to the topic of moral and ethical growth. Moreover, her practical advice is offered within a philosophical framework of maturation that we commonly associate with Catholic education.

Through my daily involvement in the preparation of Catholic school personnel and teachers at the University of San Francisco's Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership, I am keenly aware that we are forming persons who should possess the skills needed to enfold the "hidden curriculum" (Jackson, 1993) of the school into the explicit Catholic school curriculum. These two domains need to form a consistent whole, not contradict or negate one another. I believe the latter is what sometimes happens in Catholic schools when the teachers are not knowledgeable about the effects of the "hidden curriculum," nor skilled in its integration (Heltsley,1998). This was, perhaps, what Dr. Cronin meant when she claimed that the efforts in building character in Catholic schools in the past were largely *"informal and unstructured when compared with the academic curricula. Teachers have relied mainly on their own judgment and talents to mingle teachings, advice, examples of good behavior, appropriate readings, and*

positive discipline with traditional courses of study and daily lessons" (Cronin, p. 2)

My own research indicates that untutored as they may have been in the art and science of moral development, the religious women who were the bulk of the Catholic school teaching corps in the very early days, did bring to the classroom the valuable practices of integrity and indivisibility learned in the convents. (Keating and Traviss, in press) It seemed that religious life was an excellent laboratory for forming teachers in the specific areas mentioned by Dr. Cronin. Living with other religious teachers helped hone the skills of integrating didactic teachings with conduct, recognizing the impact of role models, experiencing the advantages of good reading, and witnessing the relationship between discipleship and behavior.

Now that our Catholic schoolteachers no longer come from convents and brothers' residences, Catholic universities are called upon to provide the unique ministerial and academic skills for Catholic schoolteachers. Specialized programs affiliated with professional schools of education are being asked by the Church to continue the formation of those special qualities characteristic of Catholic schools teachers and to build their professional expertise in areas long associated with Catholic schools. (USCC, 1981) The Church's institutions of higher learning must once again come to the aid of the Church and place their resources at her service. In recent years, our schools have been staffed, in large measure, by laity not experienced in the religious life and who were educated during the religious turmoil and uncertainty of the 1960's and 1970's. How can the Catholic universities with programs designed to educate Catholic school personnel make a contribution to our current Catholic schools? How can they help the post-Vatican II lay teachers and those who are newer to the profession become proficient moral educators? What are we doing to ensure that the character formation practices enunciated by Dr. Cronin are an integral part of a Catholic schoolteacher's professional repertoire?

Understanding of the Role of Moral Educator

Dr. Cronin itemizes the characteristics of good character development. Teachers and administrators need to understand that these characteristics must first be visible in their own persons. Research demonstrates that children act morally when they are

treated morally (Kohlberg, 1984). Children understand goodness because they see goodness acted out. They come to admire goodness in persons significant in their lives—their parents and teachers—and, as they grow up, older friends and role models in the sports and entertainment arenas. Example is perhaps the most powerful tool a caring moral adult can use to form the character of children. Children learn to respect others because they observe respect among and between the adults whom they encounter most often and among and between those who mean a great deal to them. The behavior of all adults, including childcare persons, librarians, crossing guards, coaches, the school secretary, the school nurse and scout leaders, impacts character formation of children.

Professional schools at Catholic universities are currently preparing Catholic school principals to refine their hiring practices to focus on professional competence and knowledge of the Catholic school culture, and on moral character and spiritual development. They are also developing administrator skills for working with parents to ensure a united front of home and school, especially when dealing with the very young child. Older children grow by learning to deal with conflicting values especially when the exposure is gradual and the home base is solid and supportive of the school's teachings. However, very young children are confused when significant others in their lives have "different values." The Vatican documents have been clear about the role of the Catholic school in working with parents: *"Every school should initiate meetings and other programs which will make the parents more conscious of their role, and help to establish a partnership"* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, #43). School personnel need assistance in facilitating the learning of adults. They must become familiar with adult leaning models and the ways in which children learn.

Didactic Teachings

Dr. Cronin writes that a person of good character possesses *the "knowledge of moral goodness that should define all behavior"* (Cronin, p. 4), but teachers have to know how to impart moral teachings so children internalize and take ownership of them for their own use. Without exception, the cognitive moral developmentalists (e.g., Piaget, Kohlberg, Lickona, Power, Gilligan) insist that moral truths take hold most firmly when they are accompanied by the reasons why a particular teaching

is the right and good thing to do. These reasons are most effectively taught by those who are important in the child's life.

Didactic teaching is often associated with "telling" and is necessary in order that Catholic educators pass on to the next generation the centuries of moral wisdom from the Church. When teachers carefully and appropriately share the reasons why the Church teaches what she teaches, children gradually see the inadequacy and the incompleteness of their own moral reasoning and seek reasons which more sufficiently satisfy their felt needs to make moral sense of daily problems. In order to do this well, teachers must fully understand for themselves the reasons for the Church's teachings and, even more, they must love those teachings. Today's Catholic school preparation programs are currently addressing these concerns about didactic teaching.

Building of a Climate for Moral Growth

Dr. Cronin's paper mentions several teaching practices that we are currently including in our graduate level moral education courses for educators. Perhaps the practice that requires the most concentration and effort is the creation of a moral climate in the classroom. Because teachers tend to teach as they were taught, the eradication of practices used by teachers in past generations requires assiduous attention. For example, building a climate that facilitates moral growth necessitates an environment of rationality, an exchange of reasons why something might be so. It is the opposite of "telling" or indoctrination strategies that are efficient and expedient, but unsuited to ethical development. Discussion that involves critical thinking is not an exchange of ignorance but of reasons; reasons that have a basis in fact, in belief and in deeply held opinions for which the person holding them has a reason for doing so. It takes time to apply critical thinking to the discussion, to offer viewpoints, gather information, reflect and pray. There is so much material to teach children in a school day that there is often the temptation to just cover the book and not take the extra time to meet the needs of the students. Yet, character development demands this expenditure of time to build a climate. Clark Power, noted moral educator and researcher at the University of Notre Dame, concluded that, *"...the best approach to character education is one that provides a communal environment supportive of the virtues of trust, care, participation and responsibility."* (1997, p. 7)

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Lasting character development also mandates respect for one another, respect for contrary opinions, the practice of empathy, and an outreach to those who are different. These are hallmarks of the moral thinker and they must be taught to and practiced with children during their earliest exposure to school. Lickona claims that respect is the very heart of morality and teachers must insist that children respect one another as they learn together.

A spirit of cooperation that underscores the participation and responsibility that Power wrote about characterizes a climate that facilitates moral growth. Educators would do well to have carefully chosen groups of students collaborate on a variety of learning objectives. When students work together to achieve common ends, they also learn to trust and to care. Researchers are still studying the relationship between care and morality (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Competitiveness may add spice to some activities, but an overdose of competition instills habits of self-centeredness and exaggerated reliance on self.

Another feature of a moral climate in the classroom and wider school environment is the fostering of the self-concept. Cronin mentioned its consequence in her paper and we find that the vast majority of teacher training institutions include this skill in their curricula. Unfortunately, however, they are not demonstrating to teachers its relationship to moral development. It is important to make this connection because the research [citations] has indicated quite conclusively that persons with poor, damaged or bruised self-concepts have a great deal of trouble with moral maturation.

The climate for character development also involves the quality of communication between children and adults, peer interaction, and the witness and modeling of effective adult communication. The way in which values are communicated is often as important as the value itself. Catholic educators must learn early in their professional lives that, as ministers of the Gospel, they represent the Church to the children in their care and those young children form attitudes toward the Church based on the communication about the Church by their teachers. Respect is again the key element in all communication.

Bibliotherapy

There are dozens of practical strategies suggested by the theory of moral growth and character development, as well as

creative ones that graduates students invent based on their research on the theory and in the field. Dr. Cronin's paper suggested the use of bibliotherapy, or healing through reading, a strategy not commonly found in Catholic school graduate programs. One of the definitions of bibliotherapy is the process by which children solve problems through books ("Definitions of Bibliotherapy," 1998 [on-line]). A school could assemble a collection of children's books on moral problems, familiarize teachers about their focus and reading levels, and feature them as the student body grapples with a specific moral issue. Employing the skilled bibliotherapist is very important. The teacher should also be intimately involved. There is a helpful listing of children's books, by author, title, reading level and ethical problem in Lickona's book, *Raising Good Children* (1985). Since the advent of books, there are incidents of persons being powerfully influenced by what they read. That is why we once suggested students read the lives of the saints, or why we read a good book to our class after the lunch period everyday, or why Saint Ignatius gave up a life of soldiery to found the Society of Jesus.

Summary

Facilitating the moral development of students involves skills that do not come naturally to teachers. The range of skills that emerges from a theory of growth and change must be studied and internalized by the educator in order to design structured opportunities that provide for moral awareness, reflection, and exposure to goodness in living situations and in vicarious experiences. Teachers who wish to make a positive contribution to the ethical maturation of students are called upon to create ethical climates supported by the "hidden curriculum" and the explicit curriculum. They have to organize cooperative learning activities and insist on and model respect for all living creatures. They must teach critical thinking by the occasional use of Socratic questioning and use didactic teaching strategies in a way that avoids mindless indoctrination. They should build the self-concepts of their young charges and teach them responsibility and caring. The teacher as a moral educator must present the teaching of the Church in a dynamic and interesting manner and invite students to accept them freely because they understand them. Catholic schools need these kinds of teachers to continue the evangelical work of the Church, and our country needs

them to preserve the moral foundation on which it was originally founded.

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Sr. Mary Peter Traviss, OP, is Director of the ICEL Program at the University of San Francisco, California.

Character Development is Non-Negotiable

Matthew J. Thibeau

If an innocent bystander observed a group of young adults and did not know who they were but listened to what they said and saw what they did, could the bystander pick out the Catholic school graduate? In a fast-paced world that increasingly values the speed of information transmission over accuracy or fairness, the development of personal and societal character is critical and character development in the Catholic school is paramount. Dr. Patricia Cronin's publication, *Character Development in the Catholic Schools*, is therefore timely, on target and necessary.

Character education programs are a growing industry. There are multiple offerings from a variety of sources on just about every conceivable value necessary for living in society. My concern is that many programs are a one-time event. I have bookcases filled with wonderful binders of copious notes taken at energizing symposiums that gather dust. Single events may spark interest, but continuous practice, reflection and reinforcement are what alter behavior.

In his recent book, *Educating for Life*, Dr. Thomas Groome summarizes what I believe to be the goal and opportunity for character development in Catholic schools. He states that "*... the foundations of a 'Catholic' philosophy-cum-spirituality for educators are suggested by substantial characteristics of Catholic Christianity and these characteristics can be reflected as educational commitments throughout an entire curriculum—its content and process, its environment and purpose*" (p. 53). While the goal of Catholic education is and always has been to give students the finest in academic and faith formation, in today's society the situation is more challenging. The influence of culture on children at an early age

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can be encouraging if it is monitored, if not it can be disastrous.

An earlier catechism explained the answer to life's deepest question quite simply: We are created to know, love, and serve God. Dr. Cronin expands that by calling us to *develop "a Christ-like character."* She writes, *"Essentially, a strong character is formed and maintained as an active, well-formed conscience becomes a consistent moral guide."* (Cronin, p. 4) My reflections are at the intersection of the excellent works of Dr. Groome and Dr. Cronin. Character development in Catholic schools must be Gospel-centered, environmental, cross-curricular and non-negotiable.

Gospel-centered

Throughout Sacred Scripture and Church teachings there is a wealth of stories, exhortations and pronouncements that implore and instruct us on how to live faith-filled lives. Christ said, *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"* (John 15:12). What separates character development in a public school from a Catholic school setting is the "why." Catholic character development roots the values of honesty, sharing, justice, respect and responsibility in the grace that comes from and is mediated through the Triune God. We act this way out of love of God and neighbor.

Catholic character development is more than acquiring the skills necessary to meet the general goals of character development, as one might learn mathematical equations to understand algebra. Catholics don't have a choice about how to live as people of the covenant.

One of the most significant challenges in catechesis is the balance of formation and information. Catholic character development is faced with that same issue. For gospel-centered Catholic Christians the work of the head, heart and hands reveals the sincere disciple.

Cronin's emphasis on the importance of the gospel is found in understanding the teachings of Jesus and in being commissioned to live the good news. Dr. Cronin's paper says, *"Putting children in touch with their own behavior and its consequences and motivating in them the desire to act in the service of goodness is the essence of character education. All three dimensions are essential — knowing what to do, wanting to do it and doing it."* (p. 7) Dr. Cronin clearly develops the significance of "know, want, do" by defining a person of good character as having:

- A positive sense of self.
- A well-formed and active conscience.
- The skills of decision-making and choosing.
- An array of virtuous habits that are practiced consistently.

A school is not Catholic because it teaches religion one period a day or because religious symbols are displayed in the classrooms. A school is a Catholic school because the values presented in the gospel are integrated into all curriculum areas and opportunities are provided for students and faculty to reflect, pray and worship together. The integration of Catholic values into the all curriculum areas creates a bond which joins the formal teaching of religion with the expression of the student's beliefs through prayer and worship. It is the creative balance of information and formation. A character development program in a Catholic school prepares students to live by the beliefs of the faith in a world that sometimes glorifies an opposing set of values.

In 1976, John Westerhoff wrote *Will Our Children Have Faith?* This book gave me a new paradigm for understanding education and faith. In critiquing religious education from a theological and pedagogical point of view, Westerhoff found that it is the nature, character and quality of people's interactions that best describe religious education. Some people view children as being born with all essential knowledge and believe that barriers to maturation need to be removed. Others see children as empty vessels that need to be filled with our collective wisdom. Neither is correct. Religious education and character development in a Catholic school are communal journeys guided by the Holy Spirit. It is not what we do to or for children, it is all about how we are with children.

Environmental

The environment for character development in the Catholic schools is critical. According to Cronin, *"Everyone in the entire school community—the principal, teachers, support personnel, parish priests and families—needs to join the effort to build character in every student and fully commit themselves to use every teachable occasion to instruct, model, encourage and praise."* (p. 11)

The character development of children is a reciprocal, life-long, intergenerational process. Everyone in the communal environment must reflect the articulated values of Catholic char-

acter development, from those who sweep the floor to those who administer the sacraments. Each event in the life of the community is an opportunity to witness to our love of God and others. Expanding this concept to the social mission of the Church, Groome writes, *"Catholic schools should be communities that form citizens who care for the common good and people of faith identity to the reign of God in the world—the two functioning as one social commitment enlivened by faith."* (p. 203)

In the Catholic school setting a holistic understanding of how children learn will impact the various pedagogical approaches utilized. These approaches will greatly facilitate meeting Dr. Cronin's goal of forming a person of good character in which, writes Cronin, *"... there is a convergence of: (1) a knowledge of the moral goodness that should define all behavior,the right things to do; (2) a desire to be a good person by doing good; (3) a well-formed and active conscience to guide, to judge, and to create a sense of obligation to do the right and good thing, despite obstacles or personal sacrifice; and (4) an array of firmly established habits of virtuous behaviors that evoke the performance of good behavior readily and consistently. Essentially, a strong character is formed and maintained as an active, well-formed conscience becomes a consistent moral guide, and such virtues as patience, generosity, honesty, obedience, understanding, respect, tolerance, prudence and perseverance become habits."* (p. 4)

Cross-Curricular

If every event is an opportunity to witness then each curriculum area must offer a chance for character development. A cross-curricular faith-centered character development approach will have credibility and validity to young people only if they see the rhetoric lived out in reality. To be effective cross-curricular character development must take advantage of the latest research in education. The best educational publishers spend considerable time, talent and resources to research how children learn best. For example, Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences* directly impacts the environment and experiences of character education. His eight learning styles are:

- *Linguistic Intelligence:* Ability or giftedness in speaking and listening. People with this type of intelligence find language arts classes interesting and fun.
- *Logical Mathematical Intelligence:* Ability to deal in numbers, patterns and logical reasoning. People with this type of intel-

ligence find mathematics courses interesting and easily understand the complex concepts.

- *Spatial Intelligence:* Ability to think in pictures or the ability to recreate or reconstruct an image or a situation. Artists and engineers use this type of intelligence.
- *Musical Intelligence:* Ability to express ideas through natural rhythm and melody. Musicians, songwriters and dancers use this type of intelligence.
- *Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence:* Ability to express ideas through body movement or physical activity. Athletes and dancers use this type of intelligence.
- *Interpersonal Intelligence:* Ability to get along with and understand others. These are the friends who try to make peace and who are listen to others' problems and give advice.
- *Intra-personal Intelligence:* Ability to understand yourself. These people usually have their "act together." They know and are comfortable with who they are.

Gardner recently identified an eighth intelligence, the naturalist which is found in one who is able to recognize flora and fauna, to make other consequential distinctions in the natural world, and to use this ability productively in hunting, farming or biological science.

The Character Education Partnership, Inc. is a growing coalition of individuals and organizations dedicated to developing civic virtue and moral character in our youth. Many of the people and programs involved are first rate and reflect the tremendous need for character education in every public, private, parochial school in the nation. Given the relative autonomy of Catholic schools, the integration of gospel-centered character development across all curriculum areas is expected and achievable. For example, all major publishers include *Charlotte's Web* in their reading series. This wonderful story can be seen as a story of a pig on a farm or as an opportunity to discuss peer pressure and positive self-image. Creation can be discussed in a science class, the biblical Middle East when studying geography, and 7 x 70 as the mathematical equation for forgiveness can be discussed during a math class.

A cross-curricular approach to character development is important because one-time events have minimal lasting impact. As Cronin correctly emphasizes, *"Character development cannot simply be an 'add-on'—a series of projects or incidental activities. Rather, it must be a total and everyday school experience ... focussing*

on every large and small opportunity to build and reinforce a good character..." (p. 11)

Non-Negotiable

Christian character development in the Catholic school is non-negotiable. As people of faith, with the God of Creation sending His Son to teach and the Paraclete to sustain us, we have no choice but to live our faith in the world. The documents of Vatican II and many other Church teachings clearly state the mission of evangelism. It is our personal and communal journey.

The importance of family and parents in the process of character development cannot be understated. They are the primary educators of their children in the faith. By extension, their active participation in the child's character development is equally necessary. Children arrive at the kindergarten door with an ingrained sense of character defined by the love and example of their parents. Cronin states, *"The child's early school years are the time to begin to educate the parents about the character-enhancing value of so much of what can be taught and accomplished at school and should be taught and accomplished at home as well."* (p. 21)

Cronin's emphasis on the partnership of parents and teachers is to be applauded and I believe this partnership to be non-negotiable. It is this partnership that has been the supportive framework for the goals and objectives of Catholic schools and a tradition that has served Catholic education well. By most measures, Catholic schools exceed expectations of success. The quality of our personal and communal life may be determined by the Catholic schools success in Christian character development. Education is about preparing children for a world yet to exist. Catholic character education in the new millennium must be three-dimensional: connected to a shared and meaningful past, directly applicable to the realities of the present, and preparatory to the challenges of the future.

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Matthew J. Thibeau is President BROWN-ROA.

National Catholic Educational Association
1077 30th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007-3852
(202) 337-6232
fax: (202) 333-6706
www.ncea.org

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